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**The Reader and the Book:
Ideology and the Construction
of Identity in Narrative Fiction**

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EdD)
2004**

**THE APPENDICES ON PAGES 186-196 HAVE
BEEN EXCLUDED AT THE REQUEST OF THE
UNIVERSITY.**

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Abstract

The focus of my research is on the complex interaction between reader, ideology and text, in the context of response to narrative fiction by girls aged eleven to fourteen, in relation to both voluntary and curriculum based reading. I have explored response to narrative in three interwoven contexts: an individual case study based on response to a range of fictional texts; group response to voluntary reading and response in the context of the development of a critical literacy project, based on the class novel, against the background of culture and ideology in Northern Ireland.

The questions which I address in my research relate to the nature of the process which creates literary meaning, the relationship between narrative, representation and subjectivity, the ways in which the reader's repertoire influences response and the complex interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology of the text. Central to my thesis is the dynamic role of the reader in realizing the potential of the text and, drawing on the insights of Harding (1967, 1977), I have conceptualized that role as encompassing both spectator and participant modes. All readers, I argue, bring to the text their own repertoires of personal experience, cultural knowledge, values and beliefs and these will have a considerable influence on the reader's response to the text. I examine the relationship between narrative, ideology and subjectivity arguing that narrative, because of its multi-vocal nature, opens up opportunities for resistant as well as consensual readings. I consider how the transaction between reader and text fits into the wider context of the relationship between literary and extra-literary discourse, drawing on a confluence of reader response, cultural theory and narratology. I explore the relationship between the construction of childhood and its representation in narrative fiction written for children, arguing that understandings of childhood are ideological, that changing ideas about childhood are reflected in children's literature and that there is a dialogical relationship between actual childhood and its imaginary construction in narrative fiction. The relationship between reader and text is, I argue, dialogical and ideological.

I suggest that narrative is an evaluative context for subjectivity, presenting us with a repertoire of possible selves, which, in the process of negotiating our identities, we match to our own construction of selfhood.

1. INTRODUCTION

But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning?

(Woolf, 1980 [1932] p. 189)

The focus of my research is on the complex interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology of the text in the context of response to narrative fiction. There are three interwoven strands in the research: an individual case study, the exploration of group response to narrative and response in the context of a critical literacy project based on a shared class novel, *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980). The kinds of questions I shall be addressing in the course of the study are as follows:

- i. What is the nature of the process that creates literary meaning?
- ii. What is the relationship between narrative representation and subjectivity?
- iii. How does the repertoire which the reader brings to the text influence her response?
- iv. What is the nature of the interaction between the ideology inscribed in the text and the values of the reader, in the context of response to narrative?

In addressing these questions, I shall draw on a range of perspectives, including reader response and culturally situated theory. Central to my thesis is the relationship between reader and text in the context of response to narrative fiction. The power of narrative in giving shape and meaning to our lives has been explored by a number of theorists and is perhaps most incisively encapsulated in Hardy's dictum that narrative is:

a primary act of mind transferred to art from life (1977, p.12).

There is, of course, an ongoing theoretical debate as to the nature and value of narrative but its potency would appear to be incontrovertible (Mitchell, 1981). If narrative is, as Hardy insists, 'a primary act of mind' (1977, p.12), then this raises important questions about its role in education. Margaret Meek (1988) shows how important stories are in the intellectual and moral development of children. Bruner (1986) argues that narrative discourse is a distinctive mode of thought, a legitimate form of cognition. Rosen (1985) makes an impassioned plea for a focus on narrative in the classroom, arguing that we must enhance our understanding of its educational potency and use this knowledge to:

resist Gradgrind's progeny with their thin gruel of drills
based on floating bits of language (Rosen, 1985, p.28).

In the context of the current debate, centred on competing ideologies of English, some would argue that 'Gradgrind's progeny', in the shape of government literacy initiatives, have already materialized (Marshall, 2001). The political significance of literacy and literature (Cox, 1995; Leeson, 1985; Maybin, 2000) is evident in the high profile afforded them and in the acrimonious nature of the debate surrounding them. The value of reading, its currency as 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1973), has been publically recognized in a wealth of initiatives, including World Book Day, the National Year of Reading, the appointment of a Children's Laureate and the adoption of various other ways of promoting the enjoyment of reading, especially for boys (Elkin *et al*, 2003). Despite predictions of the imminent demise of the book with the advent of computer technology, recent studies have shown that reading is viewed positively by substantial numbers of children and narrative remains a genre of choice for many (Hall and Coles, 1999; Haslett, 2002). Far from eliminating the book, computer technology has created even more complex ways of narrativizing experience. The discourse of narrative written for children raises a number of important ethical issues; crucial to the debate is the nature of reading as an ideological practice and its significance in the construction and negotiation of identity. This may be set in the context of the ongoing debate in the field of culture studies, into the relative power of social structure and individual agency and the related question of the relationship between textual representation and subjectivity (Christian-Smith, 1993a), all issues which I will address in the following pages.

Millard (1997) points out that in many of the books that discuss response, the reader referred to is:

the ideal reader of the writer's own conception, a *mélange* of all the pupils he has encountered while teaching (p.179).

Given that this is the case, it is vital that those of us who have a professional and personal interest in learning about children's encounters with narrative, set out to explore what actual readers have to tell us about the nature of their engagements with texts.

I shall begin by considering the role of the reader, exploring, in relation to response to narrative, the concept of 'possible selves'. I will then go on to consider the relationship between narrative, ideology and subjectivity, drawing on the insights of the Russian Socio-Historical School (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986; Medvedev, 1978; Voloshinov, 1973) and on the theoretical discourse of psychoanalysis (Chodorow, 1989; Winnicott, 1971). I shall examine how the transaction between reader and text fits into the wider context of the relationship between literary and extra-literary discourse, drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1981) and Ricoeur (1981). I will then go on to explore the conceptualization of childhood and its representation in narrative fiction written for children. Following that, I will address relevant methodological issues before presenting my report which centres on response to narrative by young adolescent girls in the context of voluntary and curriculum based reading. Meek (2000) argues that:

meetings of children and texts are sites of transformations, metamorphoses of texts as well as readers... (p.198)

To discern how these changes are effected, we must listen to the voices of the young people themselves as they tell us what happens in their engagements with narrative.

Throughout my commentary, I will use the female referent, as a corrective to previous practice, for aesthetic reasons and because all of the participants in my research are girls.

2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Discourse in Life and Discourse in Narrative.

We neither capture nor create the world with our texts but interact with it (Scholes, 1985 p.111).

Central to my research is the interaction between reader and text, in the context of response to narrative fiction. The nature of that interaction and its consequences in terms of children's social, cultural and educational development are issues which have attracted the attention of a number of researchers. I shall begin by giving an overview of some of the studies which have been carried out, before going on to address the substantive issues in my research.

In *What No Bedtime Story Means*, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) shows how different storytelling styles in the home may have a profound effect on educational experience. Wells (1986) shows the crucial importance of early encounters with stories in a child's cognitive development. He concludes that children, whose parents helped them to engage with stories, managed the transition to school literacy more successfully. In her study of young children's response to stories, Carol Fox (1993) shows how children weave the words and imagery of textual encounters into their own texts. Fry (1985) explores response from the perspective of the young readers who participated in his study. Through nurturing response, he argues:

Teachers are doing their most delicate work and their best (p.102).

The wide range of response which young readers may draw on, has been investigated by Benton (1979), Fox (1979) and Protherough (1983). In his study, *Young People Reading: Culture and Response*, Sarland (1991) elicits and analyses young people's response to popular cultural texts and, on the basis of his research, provides a complex definition of response, enhanced by the cultural perspective he has adopted. Elaine Millard (1994, 1997), in her

research into children's reading at home and in school, identifies a correlation between gender roles and attitudes to reading. She suggests innovative ways of promoting reading for both boys and girls, arguing that teacher intervention is crucial in challenging pupils to develop their response. Gemma Moss (1989) also focuses on the gendered nature of encounters with texts, showing how her young writers explore questions of gender and race by experimenting with popular cultural texts. The nature of reading as a gendered practice is the focus of a collection of essays edited by Christian-Smith (1993a). These studies, which centre on the response of young adolescents to Romantic fiction, examine the consequences of textual representation on subjectivity and consider the possibilities for agency and self-determination in classroom practice.

In my own research, I hope to build on what has already been achieved by widening the perspective on response in a number of ways. First of all, there are three interwoven strands in the research; the varying contexts in which my study is located will, I hope, help to illuminate the nature of response. Secondly, my study is set in the context of culture and ideology in Northern Ireland, which gives it a somewhat different emphasis from other such studies. Thirdly, I have drawn on an eclectic mix of modern literary theory and perspectives familiar to us from the work of Harding (1967, 1977), in conceptualizing the interplay between reader and text. Finally, I was very fortunate in having the opportunity to carry out a detailed individual study over a period of four years with a young adolescent reader who was responsive, enthusiastic and committed.

In conceptualizing a framework for my research, I have drawn on theoretical perspectives mapped across a range of practices, including cultural theory and reader response. I shall examine in detail the work of two mainstream reader response theorists, Iser (1978) and Rosenblatt (1968) before considering Eco's eponymous semiotic study of the role of the reader (1979). I shall then focus on the work of D.W. Harding (1977), in particular his psychological exploration of the reader as onlooker, drawing on his insights and those of Markus, H.R. and Nurius, P. (1986) in conceptualizing the fictional text as a repertoire of 'possible selves'. Following that, I shall examine the notion of ideology and how it has been theorized in relation to literature, drawing on the

work of Althusser (1971), Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), Eagleton (1976), Gramsci (1971) and Macherey (1990). I shall then attempt to develop a model of subjectivity based on dialogical theory and to consider the interplay between ideology and the construction of selfhood in the context of response to narrative fiction. I shall then explore the relationship between the construction of childhood and narrative fiction written for children in the historical context of the ongoing ideological debate.

Reader Response

If reader response theorists are viewed on a continuum, then Hirsch (1967) may be perceived as at one end, postulating that the only acceptable meaning of a text is the author's intention. Iser (1978), Rosenblatt (1968) and Scholes (1985) may be considered to be in the centre viewing the process of reading as interactional or transactional, while Fish (1980) and Holland (1968), at the other extreme, consider that meaning resides in the reader's interpretation. The position I adopt in relation to my research is that the text and reader constitute each other; the text does not have a single meaning nor a *random* multiplicity of meaning. As Eagleton puts it succinctly:

A text writes its reader and the reader writes the text (1976, p.164).

One of the foremost exponents of Reader Response theory is Wolfgang Iser. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), he presents a very detailed analysis of what happens when we read a fictional text. Iser argues that the reader plays a dynamic role in realizing the potential of the text. Literature is seen as a form of communication but it differs from the expository text in that the literary text encapsulates layers of meaning which the reader unravels through a complex process of ideation. In defining the nature of the process, Iser draws a parallel between the function of the literary work and the concept of language as 'performative' expounded by the philosopher J.L. Austin (1962). This model is, of course, limited in that a text can only be construed as a *virtual* speech act. The text has a repertoire of social and cultural values and literary allusions which will emerge through the perspectives of implied author, narrator, plot,

character, narratee, implied reader and real reader. The concept of implied reader was introduced by Iser. He defined it as a hypothetical reader:

situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him (Iser, 1978, p.38).

The actual reader will bring her own thoughts and experiences to the text and the interaction will be partially determined by the extent to which the repertoire of the text and that of the reader is shared. This interaction takes place between two poles, the artistic pole of the author and the aesthetic pole of the reader. Iser compares the participation of the reader in the text to that of 'a wandering viewpoint' (1978, p.116) to indicate, metaphorically speaking, the meandering nature of the journey through the text. The direction taken by the reader is determined by her interaction with the text at pivotal points, what Iser describes as blanks and indeterminacies in the text which the reader must negotiate. He argues:

The meaning of the literary text is not a definable entity but if anything, a dynamic happening (ibid., p.22).

The more indeterminate the text the more substantial is the role of the reader. However, it does beg the question as to who is the final arbiter in deciding whether or not the full potential of the text has been realized or indeed if final arbitration is possible.

In relation to the ideology of the text, Iser argues that the value placed on social norms relates to their affirmation in terms of characters i.e. if they are embodied in the hero / heroine then their values are affirmed. Minor characters are often used to convey negative messages in terms of the ideology of the text. Iser argues that the more committed a reader is to a particular ideological position the less she will be prepared to accept her values being questioned and if she finds the text oriented towards rejecting those values she will be inclined to reject the text. If the social and cultural background of the fictional work is familiar to the reader, the questioning of values will enable the reader to look at society from a different perspective. However, there does appear to be a

paradox inherent in this argument. If the reader rejects a text which embodies values different from her own, to what extent can she develop fresh perspectives or grow in self awareness through interaction with the text? To what extent is rejection of the ideology of the text determined by factors other than the values of the reader? Is the reader more likely to reject a text which is polemical or didactic in style, if it embodies different values? These questions are left unresolved by Iser and I shall return to them in due course. Iser argues that the literary work does not reflect reality like a mirror; it creates its own reality through the interaction of the author's vision and its realization by the reader. The text familiarizes the unfamiliar and makes strange the familiar. Because of the dynamic nature of the reader's participation:

reading is experienced as something which is happening and
happening is the hallmark of reality (ibid., p.68).

Literature presents a picture of human potential, drawing us imaginatively into the web of experience created through interaction with the text. Iser argues that in the process of reading fiction we have the feeling of being in a real world because the accumulation of details and perspectives gives us the illusion of depth and breadth (ibid., p.116).

The modernist novel ironically focuses on the illusionary nature of the classic realist text by showing that real life does not progress in a similar way to that of traditional narrative structure and that the reader's expectation that it does so is cultural and historical in nature. Iser draws on cognitive theory by linking the textual connections made by the reader to the concept of 'good continuation' as used in the psychology of perception. In the process of reading, the division between subject and object disappears and this intensifies the experience in such a way that the reader feels that her presence in the text is almost tangible. The literary work is transformational in that:

it enables us to transcend that in which we are otherwise
entangled - our own lives in the midst of the real world
(ibid., p.230).

The role of narrative in giving shape and meaning to our lives has been explored by a number of theorists. Louise Rosenblatt (1968) is an influential exponent of reader response theory who draws on Dewey and Bentley's transaction formulation for the social sciences (1949), as a framework for her exploration of response based on the case study method. Although Rosenblatt shares many of Iser's views, she rejects the term 'interaction' as being too mechanistic, preferring 'transaction' which suggests:

an event involving a particular individual and a particular time, under particular circumstances in a particular social and cultural setting (1985, p.100).

In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt's aim is to show that:

the study of literature can have a real and even central relation to the points of growth in the social and cultural life of a democracy (1968, p.11).

Rosenblatt argues that the power of literature lies in the fact that it provides an emotional as well as a cognitive experience. Reading literature, she asserts, fosters the ability to enter imaginatively into the needs and hopes and dreams of others. Rosenblatt posits the view that this ability can be fostered, by encouraging young people to read a variety of different types of literature including contemporary fiction. She discusses the social, psychological and individual benefits of the reading experience and argues that literature introduces the reader to the concept of social and cultural diversity, freeing her from:

the provincialism of time and space (ibid., p.273).

The literary experience may help young readers to realize that their problems are not unique, they are shared by others, albeit characters in a book. The power of literature, argues Rosenblatt, lies in the fact that it provides a 'living through experience' (ibid., p. 38). She speaks of literature as having:

something of the warmth and colour and immediacy of life
(ibid., p.182).

As well as experiencing the sense of security engendered by the realization that others may share the same problems and difficulties, the reader sees events unfolding from the point of view of the characters. Rosenblatt argues that this may help the reader to develop a greater understanding of how others think and feel as well as gaining insight into the relationship between actions and their consequences. Understanding of the values of the text may come about, for example, through appreciation of the ways in which characters interact. Like Iser, Rosenblatt sees the role of the reader as dynamic:

Everytime a reader experiences a work of art it is in a sense
created anew (ibid., p.113).

Once the work is written the umbilical tie with the author is broken and the text is recreated in the image of the reader. The implications of what is written may extend beyond what the author originally intended and will be at least partially determined by the reader's psychological, social and cultural repertoire. Rosenblatt argues that in subtle ways, through enabling us to develop a wider perspective and a deeper awareness of social and cultural diversity, as well as the complexities of individual motivation, literature may induce the student to modify her own values. By reflecting on the values implicit in the text, the student will be encouraged to examine her own framework of values and so the literary experience will help the reader develop her own sense of identity (ibid., p.273). In relation to the question of subjectivity, Rosenblatt rejects both the individualistic and the deterministic conceptions of human selfhood. The former, she argues, is naive and the latter sees human beings as mere cyphers in the socio-economic system. The individual, she argues, is influenced by many different experiences, both primary and secondary. Literature is one of these experiences and the literary experience is influential because it works on an emotional level. It enhances learning because it marries the affective and the intellectual, offering:

an opportunity to think rationally in an emotionally coloured
context (ibid., p.228).

In relation to the educational context, Rosenblatt is critical of the dualism inherent in the split between arts and science. Students should develop:

an understanding of the spirit of scientific method, (ibid., p.134).

which she defines in somewhat positivistic fashion as a quest for truth. In a clear departure from the tenets of new criticism, she exhorts teachers of literature to familiarize themselves with the guiding principles of psychology, sociology, anthropology and literary history, so that they might develop their understanding of the ways in which these domains illuminate the concepts of individual development, the relationship between the individual and society, the diversity of cultural conditioning and the process of social change. Although Rosenblatt extols the benefits of English teachers drawing on scientific understanding to enhance literary experience, she also puts forward the view that the type of information book used in social science courses is much less effective in enhancing understanding of the human condition than the study of literature. In relation to educational practices she enlists the benefits of group and class discussion on aspects of literature. By listening to others, she argues, students are in a better position to clarify their own views. The exchange of ideas in a supportive environment can be seen as a form of metacognition in which learners are enhancing their understanding through the social construction of knowledge. By engaging in the process of reading, reflection and discussion, students are developing the two ways of knowing which Bruner (1986) distinguished as narrative and paradigmatic modes. The paradigmatic mode is based on logical scientific reasoning while the narrative mode is developed through stories. Rosenblatt's student centred approach, her emphasis on the development of learning by the forging of links between the affective and cognitive domains, her recognition of the importance of context and her emphasis on the social, co-operative nature of learning all have resonances, in terms of learning theory, of the Social Constructivist perspective underpinned by the theories of Bruner (1986) and Vygotsky (1962, 1971, 1978) and this accords with my own approach. However, in relation to classroom discourse, I would argue that we need to move beyond the emphasis on personal response to develop a greater understanding of the political and

cultural nature of the reading process. Students need to recognize that narrative is a construction, they need to develop awareness of the ways in which ideology is embedded in texts and of the strategies through which readers are positioned by texts. I would argue that reader response theories do not take sufficient cognizance of the linguistic and cultural positioning of readers (Belsey, 1980) and of the tension which may exist between personal response and the cultural context in which it is articulated. This tension may be generated, not just in terms of the wider cultural context, but also in relation to the micro-political climate of the classroom itself. Students are members of diverse interpretive communities, which may exist in an uneasy relationship. The 'official' classroom community may jostle for position with the world of the peer group. The ways in which literature is taught may significantly affect response and this means that discussion may not always have a positive outcome in developing critical awareness; sharing and modifying response in certain circumstances may mean that the 'dominant' reading prevails. We need to invite students to reflect on fiction as a discursive practice, moving beyond individual response to understand and critique the values encoded in the text.

The Role of the Reader

As I have argued, ideology is part of the structure of the text and the way in which it operates is determined by many different factors; one of the most important of these is the relationship between text and reader. In *The Role of the Reader*, Eco (1979) explores the nature of this relationship. He defines the closeness of the interaction as follows:

A text is not a crystal. If it were a crystal, the co-operation of the reader would be part of the molecular structure (ibid., p.37).

Eco distinguishes between 'open' and 'closed' texts. The open text is ambiguous and indeterminate and characterized by changing perspectives. In the open text, the reader plays a creative role. Examples of open works are Joyce's *Ulysses* and Brecht's *Mother Courage*. At the other end of the continuum are the 'closed' texts where author and implied reader share the same values and it is assumed that the reader will accept the underlying

ideology of the text. Eco recognizes the significance of the relationship between literature, culture and ideology. He argues that:

in every century, the ways that artistic forms are structured reflect the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality (ibid., p.57).

The 'open' work, often a modernist text, is associated with the reaction against positivism in science and philosophy and, as in *Ulysses*, may project a vision of history as cyclical rather than teleological. In relation to the 'closed' text, repetition lulls the reader into a false sense of security, reassuring her by constant reiteration of what she already knows, affirming the stability of a shared value system and reiterating the message that nothing has changed, the status quo is preserved and the equilibrium remains undisturbed. Superman uses mythological powers, not to revolutionize the world, but to reform Smallville. Eco suggests that one of the reasons for the popularity of this type of fiction is the very nature of the society in which we live. Our society, he argues, is characterized by lack of stability, a massive increase in consumerism and information overload. The type of fiction which does not make too many demands on us, offers a welcome form of escape from the tensions inherent in our lives. The comfort of the popular narrative lies in:

the withdrawal from the tension of past - present - future, to the focus on an instant which is loved because it is recurrent (ibid., p.120).

There does appear to be a paradox inherent in Eco's argument in that, if the popular novel provides a form of escape from the tensions generated by our society, why are we reassured by the message that the status quo is preserved? Is it that we are comforted by the assurance that despite the apparent instability of contemporary society, at a deeper level nothing changes? Ironically, the closed text is open to 'aberrant' readings if the value system of the implied author is not shared by the reader. Eco described the implied reader of such a text as:

a merely intuitive sociological speculation (ibid., p.8).

A reader who shares the ideology of the implied author will enjoy the narrative at that level. The reader who questions the ideology will adopt a more critical stance. The critical reader is also more likely to focus on the gaps in the text, on what it does not say as well as its avowed meaning. Each individual reader has her own ideological perspective and this constitutes a significant factor in the interaction between reader and text. Eco argues that ideological ideas on the part of the reader can lead to an 'aberrant' reading of the text. He terms this code switching. An example of this type of response can be found in the interpretation by the working classes in nineteenth century Paris, of a novel by Eugene Sue entitled *Les Mysteres de Paris*. At the time he wrote this narrative, Sue was a wealthy bourgeois who had committed himself to socialism. Eco argues that Sue's ideology was reformist in that he did not advocate change in the structure of society but his proletarian readers interpreted the novel as a call for revolutionary action and Sue stood accused of having influenced the uprising of 1848 and was exiled to Annecy. The open work draws attention to itself as a construction and invites the reader to participate not only in the interpretation but in the creation of meaning. However the work is constructed in such a way that the anticipated multiplicity of response will be oriented from a particular direction. Although Brecht's plays are considered 'open' works and his aim was to develop a dialectical relationship with his audience, Brecht was a didactic playwright committed to a Marxist point of view and was concerned that his plays would contribute to changing the course of history. To this end, he employed the formalist device of estrangement, to show the audience a different perspective on aspects of society which they took for granted, thus showing that 'natural' ideologies were in fact culturally produced. The 'open' work is defined by Eco as:

the semantic - pragmatic production of its own model reader
(ibid., p.10).

At the other end of the spectrum, Eco locates the closed work. However it needs to be remembered that most texts are open or closed to a greater or lesser degree. A completely 'open' work would be unintelligible. Eco defines 'redundancy', the repetition of cliché, stock phrases, trivial detail as one of the characteristics of the 'closed' work. However, he also points out the wealth of

meaning in the stock phrase. For example, the phrase 'Once upon a time', which he describes as an 'overcoded' expression, suggests that the events took place long ago, in a mythical place outside the realm of history, that the events which happened belong to the world of magic and that the speaker is going to tell a story. Eco argues that:

The decoding of a message cannot be established by its author but depends on the concrete circumstances of reception (ibid., p.172).

The Role of the Onlooker

In developing my research, I have drawn on the insights of D.W. Harding (1967, 1977), who explored psychological aspects of response to reading in the 1930s and is considered to be one of the earliest reader response theorists. His work, together with that of Rosenblatt (1968) became very influential in the 1960s. In conceptualizing the role of the reader, Harding has utilized the metaphor of the 'onlooker' to explicate the reading process and this conceptualization was further developed by Britton (1970). Harding compares the reader to a spectator at an event. The spectator shares in the experience of the participants, imagining the kind of feelings they are experiencing, responding emotionally to their situation and assessing it in terms of her own values and experiences. The process of evaluation, Harding argues, plays a considerable part in the response of the onlooker who, as a detached spectator, has the freedom to reflect on the events unfolding. Harding argues that events at which we are onlookers are highly significant in the shaping of our beliefs and values. He postulates that the kind of events at which we 'spectate' may in fact make a much deeper impression on us than events in which we are participants. He asserts:

To obliterate the effects on a man of the occasions on which he was only an onlooker would be profoundly to change his outlook and values (1977, p.61).

As well as looking on at actual events, we can reconstruct in imagination events which happened in the past; we can also imagine what might happen in the future. During these episodes we are spectators of our own remembered pasts and speculative futures. In a sense, we are acting out a dual role, as spectators and participants. Using the metaphor of onlooker, we can develop an analogy with the role of the reader. Narrative is a make believe world which extends the possibilities of human experience. The reader as onlooker, shares imaginatively in the world of the story, while tacitly evaluating that world as it unfolds. The evaluative response can vary in intensity (Benton and Fox, 1985) but it is an integral part of the response. Imaginary onlookers have been described variously as 'ghostly watchers' (Harding, 1967, p.12) and 'dark watchers' (Fox, 1979, p.32). In developing the concept of reader as onlooker, I would suggest that not only is she evaluating the narrative but crucially she is also engaged in a process of *self* - evaluation. Just as the onlooker at an event imagines what it would be like to be a participant, so the reader enters imaginatively into the world of the text, exploring its implications in terms of her own subjectivity (Stephens, 1992). Narrative, as representation of future selves, may influence the reader as 'onlooker' just as the spectator's values may be shaped by the situations in which she has been an observer.

Actual World, Possible Selves

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduce (in relation to cognitive psychology) the concept of 'possible selves' and I would like to adopt the term and explore its implications in relation to narrative fiction. They define possible selves as:

a critical domain of self knowledge (ibid., p.954).

The notion relates to how individuals think about their potential and their future. The concept of the self is a very complex one and research has shown that constructs of the self are culturally influenced and that this has specific consequences for the ways in which individuals perceive themselves and their relationship to society. In American folklore:

the squeaky wheel gets the grease (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p. 224),

while in Japan, proverbial wisdom warns that:

the nail that stands out gets pounded down (ibid., 1991, p.224).

The dominant western view of the self as agentive, unique, and self expressive has been encapsulated by Geertz as:

a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively, both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background (Geertz, 1975, p. 48).

This is not to suggest that such a view is homogeneous; like Habermas's 'ideal speech situation' (1970), it might be considered aspirational rather than realizable. It is in fact riven with contradiction as it runs against the hierarchical grain of society; in relation to children, they are expected to defer to adults, conform to parental expectations and comply with school rules. Narrative as a discourse is, of course, influenced by the cultural assumptions regarding the construal of individual identity (Stephens, 1992) and the reader will find in narrative many examples of future selfhood validated by the culture. It could be argued that, paradoxically, one of the reasons why Blyton and Dahl are so popular with children is that they foreground the culturally validated image of the individual as independent, agentive and self-determining at the expense of the socially acceptable image of the child as compliant, conforming and co-operative. Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that visualization of possible selves includes the kind of selves we want to become, the selves we could become and the selves that we are fearful of becoming. These possible selves are not conceived as abstractions but as imaginary constructions in narrative form of what the future could hold. Our repertoire of possible selves is shaped by our particular socio-cultural historical circumstances. The relationship of possible selves to society is analogous to that of the reader and textual discourse in that both exist in a dialogical relationship to society. Narrative, as I have already argued, presents us with a

repertoire of possible selves, not just in terms of individual characters but also in relation to the concept of different characters as representative of the different facets of the individual; in the process of the negotiation of our own subjectivity, we match these possible selves to our own construction of selfhood. The element of evaluation is a very significant part of the process. It is as if we are onlookers, imaginatively reflecting on and evaluating the extent to which fictional characters embody the kind of selves we want to become. Here we might also draw on Lacan's insights into the ways in which, as subjects located in language and culture, we form illusory images of ourselves out of mirrored others in the ongoing negotiation of our identities. The unconscious, Lacan argues, is structured like a language so the text can be seen as an image of the unconscious. Through our relationship with fictional characters we are in a sense creating our possible selves, seeing ourselves as unified and coherent, yet aware at the same time of the disjuncture between the image and the actuality, the imaginary and symbolic (Lacan, 1977). The concept of possible selves in relation to narrative may explain the popularity of certain texts, as I have already pointed out in relation to Dahl and Blyton. In a study of young female students who were avid romance readers (Willinsky and Hunniford, 1993), their research showed that the respondents read the romance as a kind of blueprint of their future, a template of what to wear, how to act, what to talk about. The romance offers:

a bright, scintillating preview into the immediate future
(*ibid.*, p.94).

Cherland and Edelsky (1993) conducted an ethnographic study on response to popular fiction, focusing on seven girls aged eleven and twelve who were pupils in an elementary school. The girls used their reading to explore possibilities for agency in their own lives. In relation to the eponymous series published by Scholastic, they saw the baby-sitters as being in control, earning their own money, shaping their own lives. In Christian-Smith's study (1993b) into the response to romantic fiction of twenty nine young women aged between twelve and fifteen, she reports that for many of the students, the novels opened a space in which they could construct an imaginary future very different from the straitened economic circumstances in which they found themselves.

However, they were aware of the disjuncture between their invented worlds and the world in which they lived (Christian-Smith, 1993b).

The concept of narrative opening up a repertoire of possible selves can also be utilized to explain why certain texts are rejected by young people. In discussing this aspect of response, Sarland (1991) characterizes it in terms of readers:

not finding themselves in the text (p.91).

In his report, one of the respondents, Nina, described the experience of not being able to 'picture anything' (p.92) in relation to her reading of *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 1948). The characters in this novel appear to be depicted as powerless in the face of the socio-economic forces ranged against them and the closure of the book seems to suggest that desire for material possessions is foreign to the culture of the indigenous Indians who are the protagonists and that it is their succumbing to this desire which leads to violence, death and alienation. In Sarland's study, students appeared to reject the cultural determinism of the text. They were unable to:

produce the text, open it out, set it going (Barthes, 1977, p.163).

The 'possible selves' they found in the text did not resonate in any way with their own sense of selfhood.

Ideology and Subjectivity

In exploring the interaction between ideology and subjectivity in relation to narrative, it will be necessary to examine in detail how that relationship has been conceptualized in theory. My specific focus is on narrative written for children. However, I will begin by considering narrative as a general category before going on to examine the construction of childhood and its representation in children's literature. The argument I am developing is that narrative is inherently ideological (Belsey, 1980; Eagleton, 1976) but that, because of its *multi-vocal* nature (Bakhtin, 1981) it opens up opportunities for readers to

question its ideological assumptions; the text contains within it the seeds of its own deconstruction. I shall begin by exploring the notion of ideology. The word itself has a very complex history. As Geertz puts it:

The term ideology has itself become thoroughly ideologized
(1993, p.193).

It first appeared in English in 1796, having been coined by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy to refer to the science of ideas. Williams (1976) identifies two strands of meaning in relation to ideology: the pejorative sense popularized by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845 - 1847) in which ideology is viewed as false or distorted thought, and the neutral sense of ideology as a system of ideas or beliefs characteristic of a particular class. It is the latter sense of the term which I am utilizing in my research but since I am also relating ideology to questions of *power*, I have termed it the critical, rather than the neutral sense of the concept. Drawing on Eagleton (1991), my definition of ideology is as follows:

a body of socially significant ideas, characteristic of a group
or class which manifests itself through a range of discourses
and is concerned with pivotal power relations.

Eagleton (1976) argues that the literary text produces ideology in the same way as a dramatic performance is produced. The text refers, not to the real, since it is 'cut loose' from connection to actual events, but to an ideological representation. The meaning of the text does not lie in its representation of reality but rather in how its existents contribute to the shaping of:

a particular process of signification (ibid., p.74).

The text distantiates itself from actuality because:

the significations it works into fiction are already
representations of reality rather than reality itself (ibid.,
p.175).

For example, in relation to Dickens's novel, *Bleak House*, Eagleton argues that we should not make a direct comparison between the London depicted by Dickens and the 'real' London. The London of *Bleak House* does not signify Victorian England, rather it signifies some of the ways in which Victorian England represented itself (Eagleton, 1976). All fictive texts, argues Eagleton, distance themselves from actuality to a greater or lesser degree, even the 'prosaic' text. The literary text reveals in a coherent and condensed fashion the ways in which ideology inheres in lived experience offering:

experiential access to ideology (ibid., p.101).

This argument resonates with that of Althusser, who defines ideology as:

the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (1971, p.155).

Althusser postulates that through ideology, society interpolates us by fostering the illusion that we are unique and valued individuals (ibid., p.161). Drawing on Gramscian theory, Althusser posits the concept of 'Ideological State Apparatuses', which reproduce and sustain dominant power relations in society. These I.S.A.s include the school, family, church and media. Through them, Althusser argues, individuals are inscribed in the ideological formation:

All ideology has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as subjects (ibid., p.160).

However, Althusser offers a way out of this constant process of ideological recycling. He argues that the nature of art allows us to experience the ideology which shapes it; we can feel it and perceive it and it is this process which enables us to develop a critique which will allow us to identify the play of ideological signification inscribed in the text. This argument was developed by Macherey, who suggested that literature illuminates the workings of ideology by highlighting the dissonances within it, revealing the gaps and silences in the text, what Macherey calls:

the area of shadow in or around the work (1990, p.215).

The narrative, he argues, does not 'know' itself in the sense of being able to reflect on its own determinants. The silences in the text may be buried in the unconscious of the text and must be articulated by the critic:

Silence reveals speech - unless it is speech that reveals the silence (ibid., p.218).

The writer, argues Macherey, constructs fiction from the 'materials' available in society - beliefs and attitudes, literary conventions, the ways in which people make sense of their lives. The power of ideology is inscribed within these materials. The text does not reflect ideology rather, by reformulating ideology, it shows up its internal contradictions and enables us to identify the illusory nature of the ideologies it sustains (ibid.). The fragmented nature of ideology as it is represented in terms of 'common sense meanings' is one of the themes developed by Gramsci (1971) in *The Prison Notebooks*, written between 1929 and 1934. It was while he was held in prison by Mussolini that Gramsci developed his theory of hegemony. He argues that although culture is constructed through a complex web of meaning, there is a strand which is authoritative. An alliance of dominant groups will attempt to impose its world view on society through force if necessary, but also, and more importantly, through eliciting consent to the dominant view. Gramsci argues that in a parliamentary democracy:

the attempt is always to ensure that force would appear to be based on the consent of the majority expressed by the so - called organs of public opinion - newspapers and associations (ibid., p.80).

Gramsci rejects the notion of ideology as false consciousness and the metaphor of an economic base *supporting* a superstructure. He argues that the material base is connected to the political and cultural apparatus of the dominant groups, the mass media, the courts, the educational system and it is these institutions, rather than purely economic factors which uphold hegemony. For Gramsci, ideology is rooted in the practical conditions of everyday life. He defines it as:

a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life (ibid., p.328).

He identifies popular culture as a crucial element in the struggle for power and control. Although ideology can be formulated as a unified system of ideas, it often appears fragmented as common sense interpretations of the world. 'Common Sense' then becomes a site of ideological struggle as ideas are contested, particularly in the arena of popular culture. Hegemony is never static; it is constantly engaged in a process of negotiation, struggle, renegotiation as it is challenged by counter- hegemonic alliances. Gramsci's insights are very relevant to a study of the relationship between narrative, ideology and the construction of identity. As I have argued, culture is the key site in the struggle for hegemony and literary production and consumption is an important aspect of the cultural apparatus, both in relation to the voluntary reading of popular fiction and the study of 'literature' in education. The collection of papers edited by Linda Christian-Smith (1993a), analyses in detail the ways in which response to popular fiction is a site of accommodation and resistance to hegemonic social structures. Sarland (1991) has explored response to popular fiction in the context of pupils' voluntary reading and he concludes that:

popular material is particularly useful because of its dramatization of the salient concerns of young people and because it offers a window onto current social concerns (p.133).

In relation to the study of literature in education I would argue, following Eagleton (1996, 2nd edn.), that the term literature itself is problematic in that it has hegemonic connotations of elite culture and value judgments related to social ideology. The way in which we make ideological assumptions in relation to questions of literature, culture and identity is, I think, neatly encapsulated in an anecdote related by Cox. He recalls his surprise upon seeing:

a young man with an ear ring, a tuft of orange hair and tattered jeans...(Cox, 1995 p.34),

reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1993 [1866]). Dostoevsky was credited by Bakhtin (1981), as the creator of the polyphonic novel, which celebrates the independence and indeterminacy of the hero and through its polyphonic discourse resists ideological monologism. Drawing on the Gramscian framework in relation to literature as an aspect of the cultural apparatus, it is clear that the concept is itself a contested site. A cogent example of this is the eponymous *Battle for the English Curriculum* (Cox, 1995) in which he describes how:

From 1991 to 1995, a small group of conservatives interfered with the National Curriculum in order to impose an extreme right wing version of the knowledge and skills necessary for the education of our children (ibid., p.185).

A key element in the ideological struggle was the insistence by the NCC on a prescribed list of books concentrating on children's classics which one commentator defined as reflecting:

an outmoded spectre of childhood, frozen in a sentimental ultra traditional frame (ibid., p.90).

The attempted conservative takeover, as described by Cox (1995), shows the importance of literature as an ideological apparatus, and the compromises agreed in the final 1995 version of the curriculum, especially regarding the deletion of the prescribed lists of texts and changes in regard to the status of standard English and the teaching of reading, show the process of hegemonic negotiation, struggle and renegotiation in action.

In my analysis of the relationship between narrative and ideology, I have argued that meaning is produced through social interaction, that this interactive creative process is mirrored in the relationship between text and reader, and that *evaluation* is an integral part of the creation of meaning. The relationship between text and reader is inherently dialogical.

In conceptualizing the relationship of language, ideology and subjectivity, I have drawn on the insights of the Russian theorists, Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), Medvedev (1978) and Voloshinov (1973). Central to my research is their elucidation of the relationship between language and consciousness, their emphasis on the *dialogical* and *ideological* nature of language and their stress on the importance of the socio - historical context in which language is embedded. A salient comparison may be drawn between Gramsci's (1971) notion of ideology operating through hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces and the Bakhtinian concept of ideology forged in the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal discourse:

Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, values (Bakhtin 1981, p.79).

Centripetal linguistic currents flow towards the centre unifying and solidifying meaning and are utilized by dominant groups to impose their particular ideological perspective. Centrifugal forces are counter-hegemonic, working against the current, fragmenting ideological thought into diverse world views. They operate through the clash of diverse social registers which Bakhtin terms 'heteroglossia'. For Bakhtin and his circle, language is saturated with ideology. Finding an individual voice entails adopting an ideological perspective which is forged out of the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces. The operation of heteroglossia throws into relief the configurations of a particular ideology by framing it against others. Heteroglossia manifests itself at the micro as well as at the macrocosmic linguistic level. Bakhtin argues that language, including inner-speech is riven with centripetal and centrifugal forces, by the struggle between 'authoritative discourse' and 'internally persuasive' discourse, leading to ideological diversification. The dynamic tension produced by this struggle can be seen operating in the classroom situation where official and unofficial discourses jostle for position. In her exploration of children's informal talk in school, Maybin (1993) found that as her subjects moved from the classroom to other less formal areas of the school, such as the lunchroom, they adopted very

different roles. In the classroom they played out the role of pupil, producing various types of work for the teacher and success was evaluated in terms of academic achievement; in the lunchroom, they were young adolescents exploring particular versions of femininity. Success in this sphere was determined by attractiveness to boys and experience in dating. The young people could switch effortlessly from the 'authoritative' discourse of the classroom to the 'internally persuasive' discourse of teenage culture. The ways in which heteroglossia works, may open up opportunities for agency and creativity. However, it needs to be remembered that the operation of heteroglossia does not necessarily create the conditions for radical change. In his classic sociological study, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class kids Get Working Class Jobs*, Willis (1977) investigated the formation of a counter school culture by working class adolescents in a Midlands secondary school. He found that, paradoxically, their carnivalesque articulation of an oppositional ideology in the classroom, succeeded only in reinforcing the very social system to which they voiced their opposition through the 'ideological state apparatus' of the school.

The clash of ideology between centripetal and centrifugal forces can also be seen in the opposition which may emerge between popular fictional texts chosen by young people and the fictional texts selected by teachers as class readers. Reading popular fiction can be seen as an area where young people create their own space, their own alternative 'cultural capital' to that promulgated by the school. The alienation which some pupils experience, when faced by a class reader which doesn't appeal to them, is documented by Collins *et al.* (1997), Sarland (1991) and Ven (1996). However, in a book aimed at teachers of younger children, *Literacy and Popular Culture* (2003), Marsh and Millard outline the advantages to be gained from the creation of a 'literacy of fusion' (p.6). They explore ways in which teachers might draw on the intertextual world of popular culture to develop their pupils' creativity and critical awareness, in a context which has the potential to be highly motivating. In *Developing Readers in the Middle Years* (1994), Millard points out that the ways in which teachers promote, select and present books can have a considerable influence on their pupils' enjoyment or otherwise. A genuinely dialogical discourse, she argues, will include discussion about a wide range of

texts, including the popular texts enjoyed by students. This legitimates students' own discourse while accomplishing educational goals.

The Dialogic Imagination

In *Marzism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov (1973) focuses on the relationship between language and consciousness, reiterating the dialogical nature of meaning. He compares the interaction between speaker and interlocutor to:

an electric spark that occurs only when two different terminals are hooked together.... Only the current of verbal intercourse endows a word with the light of meaning (ibid., p.103).

This concept of the interdependence of speaker and interlocutor is fundamental to Bakhtinian theory. A crucial element in the interaction is that of the power dynamic which is inscribed in every exchange and manifests itself in the intonational pattern of speaker and listener, both of whom are positioned on a hierarchical scale which determines the balance of power between them. Intonational patterns express the values implicit in any utterance. For Voloshinov, evaluation is a fundamental element in discourse:

No utterance can be put together without value judgment. Every utterance is above all an evaluative orientation (ibid., p.105).

All utterance, he argues, including the genre of inner - speech is directed towards an addressee, real or imagined:

Utterance as we know, is constructed between two socially organized persons and in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs. Each person's inner world and thought has its stabilized *social audience* that comprises the environment

in which reasons, motives, values and so on are fashioned
(ibid., p.85).

Dialogic interaction may be co-operative, the word as a 'bridge' but it can also be oppositional, a constant struggle of accents in the process of ideological becoming. The theme of the power dynamic inherent in every utterance is developed by Bakhtin in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986). He suggests that the style of language adopted by speaker and listener is determined by their relationship:

Intimate speech is imbued with a deep confidence in the addressee, in his sympathy, in his sensitivity and goodwill of his responsive understanding. In this atmosphere of profound trust, the speaker reveals his internal depths (ibid., p.97).

The nature of the relationship between speaker and addressee is analogous to that between implied author and actual reader:

Each epoch, each literary trend and literary - artistic style, each literary genre within an epoch or trend is typified by its own special concepts of the addressee in the literary work, a special sense of its reader, listener, public or people (ibid., p.98).

Bakhtin distinguishes between the 'pure author' and the 'implied author', whom he describes as:

the partially depicted, designated author who enters a work
(ibid., p.109).

In relation to fictional texts, Bakhtin proposes the category of superaddressee, analogous to Iser's 'ideal reader' (1978); he defines the superaddressee as:

an invisibly present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue (1986, p.126).

This hypothetical addressee is one:

whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed
either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical
time (the loophole addressee) (ibid., p.126).

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) Bakhtin reiterates the dialogical nature of language including inner speech. Every utterance is structured in anticipation of a response, real or imagined:

The word, in living conversation is directly, blatantly
oriented toward a future answer word; it provokes an answer,
anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction.
Such is the situation in any living dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981,
pp.279-280).

Language, janus-like, operates in the border-zone between self and other, haunted by echoes from the past, textual and actual, the already spoken, the already written, whilst at the same time, oriented towards the future. Bakhtin, in his analysis, moves effortlessly between the discourse of literature and the discourse of everyday life and this parallels the dialogical interplay between fiction and reality in our own remembered pasts. The nature of this interweaving between life and literature is explored by Heaney (2001) in his poem *The Real Names*. He reflects on how, in memory, actual worlds and fictional selves interlock. The sound of his classmates' voices echoing through the years intermingle with the words of the school play in which they performed and were 'transformed'. He recalls watching a performance of *Twelfth Night* in Regent's Park and the identity of the jester merges with that of an 'ESN' boy in the first year class he taught as a newly qualified teacher in a secondary school in Belfast. Heaney's poem explores the relationship between language and consciousness, between literature and 'reality', and the ways in which the future as well as the past is refracted through the prism of memory. His poem illustrates how in our relationship with fictional characters, the boundaries between actual selves and possible selves become blurred through the interplay of the dialogic imagination.

The Dialogical Subject

The relationship between language, identity and ideology is one of the central themes in dialogical theory and in constructing a model of the subject, I have drawn on the insights of the Bakhtinian school (1981, 1984, 1986). The dialogical subject is constructed through language and since language is inherently ideological, the construction of subjectivity is a process of 'ideological becoming'. However, the Bakhtinian subject is not a passive consumer of ideology. Unlike Althusser's subject who is interpolated into a series of subject positions, the dialogical subject develops a sense of selfhood through a process of linguistic interaction. There are similarities posited by the model developed by Bakhtin (1981), Voloshinov (1973) and that evolved by Lacan (1977). Lacan theorizes the subject as constructed through language. During the mirror phase of development, the child sees itself as distinct from others; it identifies with an imaginary unitary self. With its entry into the symbolic order, the child is inscribed in a number of predefined subject positions. Both models of the subject are constructed through language and both are relational but Bakhtin's model of selfhood is less deterministic, more agentive than that of Lacan. In developing a model of subjectivity, we can also draw on the insights of Vygotsky (1962, 1978), a contemporary of Bakhtin, who began his career as a teacher of literature and psychology and went on to develop a theory of human consciousness. The key points regarding his theoretical perspective which are crucial to the argument I am making relate to his emphasis on the active role of the child in her own development, the importance of inner speech and dialogic interaction in the development of thought processes, and his emphasis on the social co-operative nature of learning. Vygotsky's affirmation of the potential of the child for directed learning through his theorization of the 'zone of proximal development' (1978, p.102), counters biological and cultural determinism in relation to the construction of human consciousness. In conceptualizing the relationship between self and other, we can draw an analogy with the relationship between the implied author and the characters in a novel, characterized by Bakhtin as dialogical, a relationship of reciprocity in which meaning is negotiated through an open - ended process of dialogue. However this is not a Utopian vision, it is infused with power relations and may be conflictual as well as consensual.

With regard to the Bakhtinian subject, these relationships of power are not rigidly fixed; in the process of dialogical exchange there is room for negotiation in terms of power dynamic. From the dialogical perspective, subjectivity exists in a state of unfinalizability, a state of becoming. Our sense of selfhood is shaped by a complex interweaving of genetic inheritance, life experiences and the influence of the socio-cultural context in which we have grown up. Theories about the relative importance of these different influences on the development of subjectivity have changed over time and are embedded in the socio-cultural context in which they have evolved. The model of selfhood I am proposing is that of the *dialogical self*. From this perspective, the development of selfhood is a process in which identity is forged through dialogical interaction with others, conflating the individual / society opposition, just as it conflates the self / other dualism. The relationship between the self and other can be perceived as a continuum which registers the:

different degrees each possesses of the other's otherness
(Holquist 1990, p.51).

In conceptualizing the self-other relationship Bakhtin draws on Einstein's theories to express metaphorically the nature of the relationship, which may be defined as one of 'simultaneity' (Holquist, 1990, p.19). The individual occupies a unique time - space position in relation to society and must accept 'answerability' for that particular place in existence. A human being can have no 'alibi', she alone must be responsible for fulfilling the dialogical requirements of that particular space and time. The individual experiences her own time as open, incomplete and the time of the other as finite, closed. From this perspective, the self has the potential for agency but it is a situated freedom, constrained by the social processes which constitute the individual. Although each individual occupies a unique position in existence, the self is dependent on the other to provide a sense of wholeness. Through the eyes of the other, I can see myself from the outside and narrativize my selfhood as:

a unique and unified event of being (Holquist, 1990, p.24).

In my analysis so far, I have concentrated on issues relating to language, ideology and identity, in particular the role of narrative in the construction of

subjectivity. I shall now examine how the transaction between reader and text fits into the wider context of the relationship between literary and extra-literary discourse; in conceptualizing that relationship I shall draw on the work of Bakhtin (1981) and Ricoeur (1981).

Actual Worlds and Symbolic Worlds

In constructing a model of consciousness, Bakhtin moves between the discourse of actual and imaginary existence, drawing on dialogical relationships within the novel as a model of selfhood. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) Bakhtin discusses the interplay between the literary work and the world represented in it, characterizing the nature of the relationship as symbolic. Literature and life are:

indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction (Bakhtin, 1981, p.254).

Dialogism questions the *fixity* of boundaries between literature and life. In a literary text, relationships are constructed dialogically. Characters do not lead an independent existence, they have meaning in relation to other characters and in relation to a particular plot. The relationship between text and reader is analogous to self - other interactions and replicates the dialogic interactions through which self is constructed.

The literary work is continually being renewed through:

the creative perception of listeners and readers (Bakhtin, 1981, p.254).

The concept of the chronotope facilitates the exploration of the relationship between literary discourse and extra-textual discourse in the context of the social and historical circumstances pertaining at any given time:

Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and

created chronotopes of the world represented in the work
(Bakhtin, 1981, p.253).

It was at a lecture in 1925, given by the scientist, Ukhtomsky, who wrote his doctoral thesis on theories of time (Holquist, 1990, pp. 153-154), that Bakhtin first heard the word chronotope and borrowed the term, (which means literally, time - space), to define metaphorically:

the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial
relationships that are artistically expressed in literature
(Bakhtin, 1981, p.84).

The chronotope is defined as:

the primary means for materializing time in space
(Bakhtin, 1981, p.250).

In his analysis, Bakhtin draws on relativity theory in explicating how chronotopic relationships express:

the inseparability of space and time (Bakhtin, 1981, p.84).

The metaphorical trope highlights the crucial importance of inter-relationships in dialogic theory, and in particular the ideological significance of point of view, in that the way in which an event is perceived is determined by the specific focus from which it is perceived, a vantage point which may be defined as:

a matrix of highly distinctive economic, political and
historical forces - a unique and unrepeatable
combination of ideologies (Holquist, 1990, p.167).

My time - space focus is different from that of the other, not just in terms of perspective but also because I experience my consciousness as infinite but the reality of others as finite. In defining relationships between self and other, Bakhtin uses literature as an analogy of dialogical interactions. Through this

analogy, in which he explores the relationship between particular texts and the socio-cultural context in which they were produced, Bakhtin questions the formalist distinction between literary time as convention and actual time as free from convention. Literary genres may offer a critique of the way in which the time / space relationship is conceptualized, exposing through their differing time scales (Genette, 1980), the extent to which our perceptions of time - space relations are mediated by culture and are inherently ideological (Levine, 1997). Just as the self is always in a process of becoming, so the text is continually in production:

the time - space relation of any particular text will always be perceived in the context of the larger set of time - space relations that obtain in the social and historical environment in which it is read (Holquist, 1990, p.141).

If we take as an example popular romantic fiction, its lineage can be traced back to the Ancient Greek romance, the archetypal narrative of love lost and regained (Bakhtin, 1981). In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin characterizes this type of romance as an adventure chronotope which takes place in 'empty' time and 'abstract' space, so designated because the setting and events are interchangeable in time and space. A crucial role in such a romance is played by chance meetings, predictions and premonitions, dreams and so on resulting in:

a veritable downpour of 'suddenlys' and 'at just that moments' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.95).

There is very little character development, the feelings of the protagonists do not change; they do not show any signs of maturation as a result of their extraordinary adventures. However, despite the powerful hand dealt to fate in the popular romance, the reader is secure in the knowledge that in the end the hero and heroine will survive their trials and tribulations and be reunited, their love as strong as it was in the beginning. Paradoxically, despite all the initiative being given to chance, the reader's faith in the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity is continually reaffirmed in the popular romance. The characters have:

gone through something, something that did not change them but that did (in a manner of speaking) affirm what they and precisely they, were as individuals, something that did verify and establish their identity, their durability and continuity (Bakhtin, 1981, p.106).

The ideological nature of the chronotope is revealed in the closure of the popular romance, which celebrates the resilience and invincibility of the human psyche and constructs a model of subjectivity which is fixed and immutable. At one level then, the chronotope can be understood as a kind of generic template, a formula for a particular kind of text; however, of crucial importance in terms of dialogic theory, is that the pattern of events unfolds in a time - space relationship which is constantly changing. Within literary discourse, conceptualizations of time - space relationships are shaped by particular socio - cultural contexts. Assumptions about the nature of the relationship between time and space are buried deep within the strata of the imagination. In Ancient Greece, time was conceptualized in terms of the rhythms of nature. In contemporary Western society, time is considered to afford 'a structure of possibility' (Holquist, 1990, p.119). The time - space relationship is represented metaphorically as a commodity. We talk of saving time, winning more time, investing time; likewise, we refer to a need for 'our own space', 'more space', 'giving each other space'. Bakhtin (1981) constructs a poetics of the novel but it is an *historic* poetics; generic representations are embodied in the conceptualizations of reality pertaining at any given time:

Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities; it is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities (Bakhtin, 1981, p.37).

I would argue that narrative, like time, offers us a 'structure of possibility', through which we can explore and evaluate aspects of selfhood in the process of negotiating our own identities.

Time and Narrative

Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible (Bakhtin, 1981, p.84).

In relation to Heaney's poem *The Real Names* (2001), I have discussed how actual worlds and symbolic worlds interlock in memory. Ricoeur (1981), in his analysis of the reciprocal relationship between temporality and narrative, identifies features which are common to the human experience of both. The first level he designates as the feeling of being-in-time generated by narrative, the second level he identifies as the historicity of time and narrative, in which plot by allowing time to be, as it were, inverted, embeds narrative experience within memory. Inscribed within the concept of historicity is that of consciousness as a process of *becoming*:

Every genuine important step forward is accompanied by a return to the beginning... more precisely, to a renewal of the beginning. Only memory can go forward (Medvedev / Bakhtin, 1978, p.xv).

Elaborating on the nature of how we experience narrative time, Ricoeur proposes that narrative combines two dimensions which provide a transition from the sense of 'being-in-time' to the deeper level of historicity; one dimension is linear, which moves the plot forward, the other is configurational and deepens our experience of time. For example, in relation to the quest, which is a popular structure in children's fiction and can be interpreted as a metaphorical search for identity, Ricoeur suggests that:

two qualities of time are thus intertwined: the circularity of imaginary travel and the linearity of the quest as such (Ricoeur, 1981, p.181).

The circular dimension has a dream like quality whereas the linear dimension belongs to the sphere of action. The third level identified by Ricoeur is that of deep temporality, in which narrativity transcends the immediacy of time by

reaching out into the past and future, extending human consciousness beyond the present. In the words of Bakhtin:

There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead; every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1990, pp.348-349).

The argument I am developing is that there is a reciprocal relationship between consciousness as a metaphorical representation of existence and narrative as a metaphorical representation of consciousness, that narrative, like temporality, is a fundamental way of ordering experience and that narrative plays a crucial role in the process of ideological becoming, the shaping of human consciousness.

Psychodynamics

In the post Freudian era, one of the problems inherent in the theorizing of the subject by the Bakhtinian School, lies in its rejection of the notion of the unconscious as an element in the construction of subjectivity. I would argue that psychoanalysis, which foregrounds the importance of the unconscious, has an important contribution to make to an understanding of the relationship between narrative, ideology and the construction of identity. I have referred previously to the similarities in the model of the subject developed by Bakhtin (1981) and that posited by Lacan (1977), pointing out that central to both perspectives is a concept of subjectivity which is relational and iterative. I have also outlined Althusser's conceptualization of ideology, in which he draws on Lacanian psychoanalytical theory to explicate how the subject is

interpellated by ideology but argues that art, by its nature, allows us to identify the play of ideological signification inscribed within it (Althusser, 1971).

I would suggest that by drawing on the theoretical discourse of psychoanalysis, in tandem with that of dialogism, we can illuminate our understanding of the relationship between narrative, ideology and subjectivity. This is not to suggest that these theoretical positions are fully consistent, simply that they are not wholly incompatible. The psychoanalytical school which has most in common with the dialogical model of the subject is that of the Object Relations School (Chodorow, 1989; Winnicott, 1971). The model of the subject theorized by the Object Relations School conceptualizes the self as social and emphasizes the importance of the transaction between self and other in creating and recreating a sense of identity. For Object Relations theorists, the forming of relationships is a central human drive and the self is theorized as having the:

capacity both to be alone and to participate in the transitional space between self and other... that creates play, intimacy and culture (Chodorow, 1989, p.159).

There are parallels between psychoanalytical and dialogical perspectives in that both assume that dialogue with another is essential for the subject to develop self knowledge; this is crucial from the psychoanalytical perspective for it assumes that much of selfhood is hidden in the unconscious and can only enter conscious experience through the vantage point of the other. Psychoanalytical theory suggests that the model of unified selfhood by which we live may be a fiction which enables us to impose order on reality. Here we can draw on the insights of Vygotsky (1962, 1971, 1978), who argues that thought evolves from internalized social dialogue, that development occurs first of all through social interaction and that the boundaries between self and other are not fixed and immutable but fluid. In his study, *The Psychology of Art* (1971), he recognizes that certain processes of the human mind may occur at a subconscious level, asserting that:

One of the most characteristic aspects of art is that the processes involved in its creation and use appear to be

obscure, unexplainable and concealed from the conscious mind (Vygotsky, 1971, p.71).

Vygotsky stresses the importance of *play* in child development:

In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102).

He notes the close relationship between the role of play in childhood and a child's entry into the fictional world of narrative, arguing that:

for a child there exists a psychological kinship between art and play (Vygotsky, 1971, p.257).

We can find parallels between the insights of Vygotsky and those of a leading psychoanalyst of the Object Relations School, D.W. Winnicott (1967, 1971) who has suggested that play facilitates the development of intersubjectivity, creating a 'third area' between inner and outer reality. The fictional world, which mediates between these two worlds can be conceptualized as 'a third area' in which the child can experience the interplay between inner and outer reality. The nature of that experience, the conceptualization of childhood and its representation in narrative fiction written for children are issues which I shall explore in depth in the next section and in the research report itself.

3. THE CHILD AND THE BOOK

"O Sara", she whispered joyfully. "It is like a story!"

"It is a story", said Sara. "Everything's a story. You are a story – I am a story. Miss Minchen is a story"

(Burnett, (1963 [1905] p. 109).

The concept of childhood, which is central to any discussion on children's literature, is enmeshed in a complex, intertextual web of ideological significations, reflecting social, historical and cultural preoccupations at any given time. In the decades following Ariès (1960) groundbreaking study into the history of the idea of childhood, a substantial body of work on this subject has been produced, and whilst many aspects of Ariès's arguments have been contested (Pollock, 1983), the crucial point he made, namely that the notion of childhood is not a fixed category but a cultural construct, appears incontrovertible. In this section I shall argue that the cultural understandings of childhood are ideological and affect the lives and experiences of real children, that changing ideas about childhood are reflected in children's literature and that there is a dialogic relationship between actual childhood and its imaginary construction in narrative fiction written for children.

The credit for establishing the publication of children's books as a serious business enterprise, has been awarded to the printer John Newbury; his first title, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744), (marketed with an optional ball and pin cushion), contains fables and rhymes, illustrated with pictures of children at play. The importance of play in childhood was highlighted by two key thinkers, Locke (1632-1704) and Rousseau (1712-1778). Locke, in his treatise on childrearing (1693) is credited with being the first to acknowledge publicly that play is essential to a child's development. Locke stressed that children learn from experience and promoted the use of illustration and example in children's texts. The French philosopher, Rousseau, regarded childhood as a state of innocence, best nurtured through the child's communion with nature; his vision of how this might be achieved is examined in his treatise, *Emile* (1761), in which he discusses how his educational ideals might be put into practice. Both educationists had a considerable influence on the development of new

perspectives about the nature of childhood, the conceptualization of childhood as a state of grace rather than the locus of original sin, an evocation which found its apotheosis in the Victorian image of the ‘Romantic’ child, imbued with mysticism, power and promise. Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that:

The time-space relations of any particular text will always be perceived in the context of a larger set of time-space relations that obtain in the social and historical environment in which it is read (p.141).

Although certain individuals had a substantial influence on the development of new ideas regarding childhood, it is likely that the intellectual challenges produced by the speed of social, political and economic change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, created a climate conducive to fresh perspectives, a recognition of the crucial importance of education and an intensification of the ideological debates regarding the role of narrative fiction in the process of enculturation (Hilton *et al.*, 1997). The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were dominated by the discourses of Rationalism, Evangelicism and Romanticism; the struggle for hegemony in relation to these competing ideologies is played out in the literature produced for children during this period.

The ‘Cursed Barbauld Crew’

I have suggested that in the late eighteenth century there was a cultural focus on education (Hilton *et al.*, 1997); at the centre of that discourse was a group of energetic, ambitious and prolific female writers for children whose work illustrates the complex nature of the ideological significations in which children’s literature is enmeshed. They included Rational Moralists such as Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Evangelicals exemplified in Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810) and Martha Sherwood (1775-1851); the former were influenced by Rousseau, Locke and the ideals of the Enlightenment; the latter were motivated by a deep concern for the spiritual well being of their readers and the desire to instil religion into them ‘for their own good’. These women writers took their teaching role very seriously,

developing their understanding of how children learn through close observation (Briggs, 1989). For them, books were ‘a zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102). The dialogic format of question and answer was widely adopted for use in information books whilst in narrative fiction, for example, *Original Stories*, (Wollstonecraft, 1989 [1791]) or ‘*The Governess*’ (Fielding, 1968 [1749]), a dialogic framework encompassing a teacherly figure who guides her charges in the exercise of reason and virtue, was frequently utilized. The protagonists of these didactic narratives are shown to develop and improve through the judicious guidance and good example of adult mentors. They include ‘ministering’ children (Charlesworth, 1854), who visit and tend the poor, children who have undergone religious conversion such as *Henry*, in Sherwood’s eponymous tale (1814), and dutiful daughters who sacrificed themselves in the interests of family and community, exemplified in *Ethel May*, the heroine of *The Daisy Chain* (Yonge, 1991[1856]).

Both Rationalists and Evangelicals shared a distaste for fantasy, preferring to write in a realistic and didactic vein. The Edgeworths, in their preface to *The Parent’s Assistant* (1796) asked:

Why should the mind be filled with fantastic visions, instead of useful knowledge? (Briggs, 1989, p.232)

Mrs. Trimmer, author of the best selling, *Fabulous Histories* (1786) expressed serious misgivings about the effect that certain fairytales might have on young children, ‘exciting unreasonable and groundless fears’ (Pickering, 1981, p.44) and stereotyping stepmothers (Hilton *et al.*, pp.109-110). Ostensibly, it was their opposition to fantasy which incurred the wrath of Charles Lamb, who vented his rage in a letter to Coleridge (1802):

Goody Two Shoes is almost out of print. Mrs. Barbauld’s stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery; and the Shopman at Newbery’s hardly deigned to reach them off an old exploded corner of a shelf, when Mary asked for them. Mrs. B’s and Mrs. Trimmer’s nonsense lay in piles about... Damn them! I mean the cursed Barbauld crew, those Blights

and Blasts of all that is human in man and child (Hilton *et al.*, 1997, p.91).

I would argue, following Briggs (1989), that the strong identification of women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the ideals of the Enlightenment, their repudiation of fantasy and their distrust of the imagination, could be construed as a way of using the traditional females role of nurturing and educating the young as a means of resisting dominant versions of the feminine which positioned women as superstitious, whimsical and irrational. In these narratives, the voice of the adult narrator is firm and authoritative whereas in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as Briggs (1989) points out, women writers such as Nesbit would write for a double audience using the child's viewpoint to satirize male discourse as for example when *Oswald Bastable*, (who narrates *The Treasure Seekers* (Nesbit, 1967 [1899]) in the third person) mimics the rhetoric of the patriarchal world in asserting:

Dicky... smoked the pipe of peace. It is the pipe we did bubbles with in the summer, and somehow it has not got broken yet. We put tea-leaves in it for the pipe of peace, but the girls are not allowed to have any. It is not right to let girls smoke. They get to think too much of themselves if you let them do everything the same as men (Nesbit, 1967, p.123).

Although they have been much criticized for their overtly moralistic stance, the women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made a positive contribution to children's literature through their influence on the developing genre of family stories of which the best known is *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868), which depicts a more relaxed, less formal style of family life. They also displayed a strong humanitarian spirit in their condemnation of slavery, their opposition to child labour and their advocacy of kindness to animals. (Cunningham, 1995; Myers, 1996). I have argued that children's literature is enmeshed in a complex intertextual web of competing ideologies; by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Calvinistic emphasis on original sin had been eclipsed by the Romantic image of childhood as a state of

prelapsarian innocence and heightened spiritual awareness. Although Evangelicism had lost its dominance, the new image of childhood is reflected in the work of Evangelical writers such as Hesba Stretton (1832-1911), who was deeply concerned with the plight of children living in appalling conditions in the slums and whose best selling stories feature impoverished children who struggle against overwhelming odds and whose innate goodness is a source of strength and redemption to the weak, hypocritical adults around them. Stretton was a frequent visitor to the slums of the East End of London and her fictionalized accounts of the children who lived there had a considerable impact on public opinion, highlighting the disjuncture between the Romantic ideal and the lived reality, and leading to ameliorative changes in legislation regarding children (Briggs, 1989).

The Child of the Romantics

I have argued that literary practices cannot be divorced from the extra-literary cultural formation in which they are produced, that there is ongoing dialogic interaction between the discourse of narrative fiction and the discourse of life (Bakhtin, 1981) and that the relationship between childhood and its representation in literature is profoundly ideological. The Romantic construction of childhood draws on a complex web of cultural influences, including the legacy of Rousseau, the growing belief in the beneficent power of the imagination, the influence of Gothic, and visionary images drawn from the poetry of Wordsworth, Blake and Coleridge. In the context of the Romantic aesthetic, an individual's experience of the world is most vivid and clear in childhood, which is not just a preparation for adulthood but a valued state in its own right. The lucidity of the child's vision is illuminated by the vitality of the imagination, which from the Romantic perspective, is enriched by fantasy, fairytale and dreamscape narratives. These extend the child's imaginative powers and illuminate her perception of reality, redefining metaphorically the structure of possibility in the symbolic world and in the actual world. Central to the Romantic vision is the image of the redemptive child, encapsulated for example in *Diamond*, the protagonist of MacDonald's most famous novel *At the Back of the North Wind* (1984 [1871]), which is discussed in detail in the next chapter, or in *Little Nell*, the heroine of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Dickens,

1995 [1841]), whose spirituality shines out in contrast to the greed and hypocrisy of the 'grotesque and wild' companions who surround her. Another potent symbol of Romanticism is that of the child enjoying a close affinity with nature, in the peace and seclusion of an enclosed garden. In *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 1994 [1911]), the protagonists, *Mary* and *Colin*, experience spiritual and physical renewal through the healing powers of the garden. *Lovejoy Mason*, the feisty, streetwise yet vulnerable protagonist of *An Episode of Sparrows* (Godden, 1956), finds solace in her troubled life by creating an exquisite miniature garden among the ruins of an old churchyard, intoning the names of the seeds she has sown to lull herself to sleep. In *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 1998 [1958]), the image of the garden may be interpreted as symbolizing the power of narrative to transcend the immediacy of time by reaching out into the past and the future, intertwining the linearity of quotidian experience and the circularity of memory, dream and imagination (Ricoeur, 1981). I have argued that all narrative representations of subjectivity have an ideological base and reflect the socio-historical context in which they are embedded, drawing on the concept of the chronotope to explore the relationship between literary discourse and extra-textual discourse. The Romantic perspective emphasizes the formative influence of childhood on the construction of identity, but our consciousness of childhood is drawn not just from memory and experience but also from the cultural context. Dusi (1999) argues that Modernist writers, for example Virginia Woolf, were influenced by key Victorian books for children, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll, 1994 [1865]).

Narrative fiction written for children can be conceptualized as a form of extended consciousness which opens up a dialogue, not only between actual and possible childhood, but also between the adults we are now and the children we once were (or would have liked to have been). Alan Garner for example, in conversation with Aidan Chambers (Chambers, 1980, p.279) suggests that one of his reasons for writing children's books was:

To make myself live the life that in some way I was prevented from living as a child.

George MacDonald claimed:

I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five or fifty, or seventy five (1975, p.29).

When writing *Devil by the Sea* (1997[1958]), Nina Bawden was surprised by:

how vividly my own childhood came back to me (1995, p.155).

The desire to recapture the lost world of childhood through story reached its apotheosis at the end of the nineteenth century, in narratives such as *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1987[1911]), *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame, 1995 [1908]), *The House at Pooh Corner* (Milne, 1979 [1928]). Although these much loved children's books celebrate childhood, they also express a haunting sense of pain and loss at its fleeting nature, and an ambiguous relationship between adult and child (Rose, 1984). The nature of that relationship, the exploration of selfhood and the subversion of the pretensions of the adult world are central to a text published some years earlier, which Darton (1982, 3rd edn.), regarded as 'the spiritual volcano of children's books' (ibid., p.260) and the first to advocate 'liberty of thought' (ibid., p.260), namely Louis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1994 [1865]), which sets the scene for a more egalitarian relationship in writing for children (Dusinberre, 1999).

Alice

In the labyrinthine dreamscape of wonderland, *Alice* explores the inner world of consciousness, the surreal nature of that world mirroring the disruption of certainty in the actual world of the mid-nineteenth century (Thacker and Webb, 2002). As she encounters a succession of outlandish authority figures, *Alice* is at first mystified by their irrational demands and strictures, fearing loss of identity in a world that is devoid of meaning:

“Well, it’s no use your talking about waking him,” said *Tweedledum* “when you’re only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you’re not real” (Carroll, 1994, [1865], P.165).

Gradually, as she continues to engage in power struggles with them, challenging their authority, her fears begin to dissolve and she laughs at the pretensions of the adult world, rendering it ridiculous. Lurie (1990) suggests that one of the great pleasures of children’s works is their potential to subvert the values of society, presenting a challenge to dominant discourses:

To read them was to feel a shock of recognition, a rush of liberating energy (Lurie, 1990, p.x).

The contradictory nature of competing discourses is reflected in the extent to which particular representations of childhood were parodied. In *Alice* (Carroll, 1865), the system of education, didactic stories, moralistic poems are all mocked, illuminating the change in values beginning to shape society in the Mid-Victorian era.

Actual and Symbolic Childhood

What was also becoming much more visible as the century progressed was the disjuncture between the Romantic ideal and the everyday reality of childhood experienced by children of the working classes; like their fictional counterparts such as *Becky* in *A Little Princess* (Burnett, 1963 [1905]) or the *Artful Dodger* in *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1966 [1838]) they appeared to be utterly divested of childhood. As *Miss Minchin* reminds *Sara* in *A Little Princess*:

Becky is the scullery-maid. Scullery-maids, er... are not little girls (Burnett, 1963 [1905], p.67).

In 1851, Henry Mayhew revealed the dark side of London, painting a grim picture of the appalling conditions in which the poor eked out a meagre existence. In his account of the little watercress vendor, he describes how the child:

although only eight years of age, had entirely lost all childish ways, and was indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman. There was something cruelly pathetic in hearing this infant, so young that her features had scarcely formed themselves, talking of the bitterest struggles of life, with the calm earnestness of one who had endured them all (1996 [1851], pp.114-115).

His vivid depiction of the squalor, misery and degradation of their lives highlighted the contrast between the Romantic ideal and the reality of the urban waif; from around the middle of the nineteenth century the Romantic ideology of childhood began to influence philanthropic action and encourage state intervention in the task of securing a childhood for all children (Cunningham, 1995). The idea that all children have a right to a childhood, free from responsibility and care is reflected in initiatives such as the Universal Education Act (1870), the Children's Charter (1889) and the legislation for the prevention of cruelty to children. The vision of childhood as a time of insulation from the adult world, a kind of dream world where time stands still is evident in a number of children's books published in the first half of the twentieth century. In Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series (first published in 1930), the children seem to be perpetually on holiday. For Enid Blyton's characters life is one long adventure and in Richmal Crompton's *Just William* stories (1922-1970), the exuberant young hero enjoys unrestricted freedom to roam the countryside with his dog *Jumble* and his gang *Ginger, Henry and Douglas*. Although safe and secure, the world of childhood represented in these texts is one in which children, freed from adult supervision, are enabled to take control of events, often showing themselves, in the challenges they face, to be more capable, quick thinking and resourceful than the adults who are ostensibly in charge. These narratives, in common with most children's fiction, focused on middle class life but in 1937, that situation changed with the publication of *The Family from One End Street* (Eve Garnett, 1937). This novel, which was awarded the Carnegie medal, featured the adventures of the *Ruggles* family; Mrs. *Ruggles*, a washer woman, Mr. *Ruggles*, a dust man and their seven children. Although the novel is much criticized today for its condescending tone, it is nevertheless a sympathetic and

affectionate portrayal of working-class childhood; the fact that its shortcomings were not recognized in its own day highlights the power of unconscious ideology, communicated through the patterns of language and story (Hollindale, 1988).

Post-War Childhood

The post-war years witnessed a wealth of imaginative fiction for children, exemplified in memorable texts such as, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950), *The Children of Green Knowe* (Boston, 1954) and *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 1958). These narratives draw on fantasy elements to explore existential concerns such as the construction of selfhood, the relationship between the real and the imaginary and the nature of time. The fictional dislocation experienced by the protagonists mirrors the actual separation suffered by children throughout Europe in the course of the Second World War. The sense of powerlessness experienced by children, especially in wartime, makes it all the more crucial for them to develop inner resources to deal with loss and pain and this is one of the themes central to *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce, 1958). *Tom's* exclusion from the hauntingly beautiful garden symbolizes the loss of childhood, the inevitable passing of time and the need to come to terms with change. The depth of *Tom's* sadness is alleviated by his realization that he can transcend the vicissitudes of time through drawing on his imaginative resources and those same resources will give him strength in facing the future, a future which will involve change but will also be filled with possibility. In the decades following the Second World War, change came about rapidly and I will now consider how this impacted on children's books and the construction of childhood.

The Winds of Change

The 1960s witnessed the rise of feminism, Black Power, the student movement and a growing awareness of the extent to which particular groupings within society were marginalized on the basis of their race, class or gender. This raised issues of representation in relation to children's literature; questions began to be asked about the stereotypical ways in which certain characters were portrayed and the kind of values that were being promoted through these

representations, for example, in relation to the reinforcement of gender roles and the continuing dominance of white power and culture (Dixon, 1977; Zimet, 1976). These are highly important issues; however, the initiatives taken in the 1970s to redress the balance assume a simplistic model of reading in which values are transmitted through identification with a protagonist. Central to my thesis is the argument that narrative, because of its multi-vocal nature opens up opportunities for readers to question its ideological assumptions and there is a growing body of research evidence to show the subtlety and complexity of the interplay between reader and text (Christian-Smith, 1993a; Moss, 1989; Sarland, 1991). I have argued that in the first half of the twentieth century the disjuncture between the Romantic ideal of childhood and the lived reality appeared to be lessening; in the latter part of the twentieth century the reverse seems to be the case (Cunningham, 1995). The conceptualization of childhood is riven with contradiction. There is still a tendency either to idealize or demonize children. This ambivalence is reflected in the representation of childhood as both vulnerable and threatening. The Romantic ideal has been eroded but paradoxically, there is a growing awareness of the individuality of children and a recognition that the notion of childhood as a universal referent is a fiction. Childhood is culturally variable and how it is experienced depends on factors such as geography, class, race and gender. The image of the Romantic child has been replaced by multifarious images: the child labourer, the designer child, the child soldier, the starving child. In an article about the launch of an Open University course, *Childhood and Youth Studies*, the Course Chair, Martin Woodhead, commented that:

In a place like Bangladesh, a lot of children don't know how old they are – it's not important. Those who earn a living, while, say, around the age of ten, have already joined the adult working community, while others, from wealthy families who attend an English speaking school until they are eighteen, are still seen as children, until they finish their education. This means that youngsters from affluent homes, even though they are in a country as poor as Bangladesh, have far more in common with some children in California than they do with many of their peers in their own country (Woodhead, 2002, p.8).

Buckingham (2000) argues that in the UK, as in many industrialized countries, the gap between rich and poor is widening and the resultant polarization is reflected in very different childhood experiences. According to Cunningham (1995), the trend identified by Ariès (1960), that of the growing separation of childhood and adulthood in the seventeenth century, has now gone into reverse, and the boundaries between the two have become blurred. In terms of power, the balance has shifted in favour of children whose rights have been recognized by the United Nations Convention in 1989. My purpose in this chapter is to examine the relationship between actual childhood and its fictional representation in children's literature. It is not within the scope of this study to include an exploration of the cultural evolution of the concept of adolescence as a transition stage between adult and childhood (McCallum, 1999; Spacks, 1981) nor a detailed examination of the emergence and subsequent development of teen fiction as a sub genre. I have argued that concepts of identity and selfhood are central to children's literature and that they have a particular resonance for adolescents at a time of accelerated transition in their lives, a subject which I pursue in greater detail in Research Report B, 'The Cool Web'. The diversity of the lived experience of childhood and adolescence is reflected in the wide range of fiction currently being written for young readers. Children's books form part of the narrative of childhood *and* research evidence shows that young people are very much active agents in shaping their culture, using narrative fiction to explore the construction of selfhood, to investigate issues of concern to them and to gain a sense of agency and control (Christian-Smith, 1993b; Sarland, 1991). Contemporary children's writers help their readers to negotiate their lives in an increasingly complex world, dealing unflinchingly with the harsher side of life, either metonymically as in social realism or metaphorically through fantasy. Writers such as Anne Fine, Joan Lingard, Berlie Doherty and Jacqueline Wilson deal with a range of complex and difficult issues including war, divorce, bereavement, bullying and child abuse, writing with sympathy and humour about fictional worlds in which, despite the vicissitudes of fortune, children are depicted as resilient, resourceful and capable. The ontological uncertainty of contemporary society is reflected in multi-layered narratives such as Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), which deals with complex existential issues, the kind of themes,

Pullman commented in his Carnegie acceptance speech, that can 'only be dealt with adequately in a children's book' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, p.122).

In this section, I have argued that the conceptualization of childhood is a cultural construct, that changing ideas about childhood are reflected in children's literature and that there is a dialogic relationship between actual childhood and its imaginary construction in narrative fiction written for children. The story of childhood, like its fictional counterpart, is complex, subtle and polysemous.

I shall now go on to consider methodological issues before presenting my research report, in which I explore the complex interaction between text, culture and reader.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research is an adventure of the Signifier (Barthes, R., 1977, p. 198)

My research, which centres on the role that narrative plays in the lives of young adolescent girls, was carried out over a period of four years (1998–2002) and draws on the outcome of a six month pilot project initiated in 1997. The questions upon which I focus relate to the complex interplay between the ideology of the text and the values of the reader, in the social and cultural context of Northern Ireland, at that particular historical moment. In elucidating the relationship between reader and text I draw on a range of theoretical perspectives including cultural theory, reader response, and narratology. I will begin by showing how the pilot study impacted on the design of the research, before going on to give a brief outline of each of the three strands in the main study, describe the context, indicating my role as a teacher researcher and finally explore in depth relevant methodological issues.

The Pilot Study

In the initial study, the questions I wanted to address related to the nature of the interplay between the ideology of the text and the values of the reader, the role of discussion in developing response to the shared text in the context of the English classroom, and the development of strategies to help students enhance their capacity for critical and creative thinking.

The initial investigation centred on the study of a class novel, *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980), with two Year 10 classes, one a top band and the other middle, both of whom I taught. I chose this particular novel because it had been recommended by other students and I felt that its themes of clashing ideologies and divided loyalties would resonate with young people who were themselves struggling with issues of cultural identity, justice and equality and would offer opportunities for critical reflection on matters of salient concern to them in the context of the political turbulence of Northern Ireland in the late 1990s. The ethnographic study was carried out over a period of six weeks and the data

gathered included audiotaped small group and whole class discussions, drama scripts and dialogue journals (Hackman, 1987). In the initial investigation we focused on political and cultural issues, examining the tensions between the individual and the community, exploring the dialogical nature of identity formation, drawing on students' experience in making connections between actual and symbolic worlds.

In relation to the main focus of the pilot study, students' response to a shared class text, I considered that the data showed evidence of considerable engagement with the novel but their explorations tended to focus on *what* meanings were forged in their transactions with the text rather than *how* those meanings were constructed. Booth (1988) reminds us that we are all highly selective in the ideologies we hone in on and it seemed to me, on reflection, that while we had explored a range of ideological issues, including those of cultural and national identity, we had done so within the parameters delineated by the text. What we had not done to any great extent, was to develop a reading pedagogy which would heighten student awareness of the frames of construction underpinning the text, enabling us to address issues of representation, identify the gaps and silences within the text and locate its contradictions, creating 'reading against the grain'. Since I was interested in constructing a critical model of practice, the adoption of a negative hermeneutic would enable us to examine the discursive forces at play in the narrative, enhancing student awareness of the constructedness of texts and facilitating us in the development of interrogative readings, the production of 'text against text' (Scholes, 1985, p.24).

Book Talk

In addition to the classroom study, individual pupils as well as small groups of students from both classes volunteered to meet me outside of class time to talk to me about the novel, the work we were doing on it and the teaching strategies I had adopted, a form of triangulation which was to have a substantial impact on the main research. Our discussions at these meetings soon ranged beyond the class text and students talked animatedly about the books they had read outside of school. In my interviews with individual students, we had sustained discussions about particular texts they had enjoyed whilst in my conversations

with small groups of pupils, talk tended to centre on issues around reading, for example, early reading histories, preferred reading genres, favourite authors. The talk that took place in these settings had a vitality and spontaneity which was not so evident in the classroom situation. For example, Marie attempted to capture the power of imaginary experience in her description of an earlier memory of reading *The Witches* (Dahl, 1987)

I remember sitting in my bedroom one winter's evening as dusk was falling and you know how there's a part in the story where the witches just suddenly pop up; whenever I was reading the book, I could *see* the witches in my head and when I turned round and looked out the bedroom window, I thought the witches were actually staring in at me; it was really weird and I just ran downstairs.

The enthusiasm of the students, their commitment to the texts and their obvious enjoyment in discussing their responses made me realize that the issue central to my research, the nature of the relationship between reader and text, could be elucidated to a much greater extent by engaging in that kind of exploration than by focusing solely on response to the shared class text. I wanted to retain the classroom perspective but in addition to explore the interaction between reader and text outside the classroom setting. In the development of this approach, I was influenced by Charles Sarland's study, *Young People Reading: Culture and Response* (1991) in which he studies response to voluntary reading from the perspective of the young readers with whom he discussed a range of narrative texts. I was also influenced by *Texts of Desire*, a collection of ethnographic studies, edited by Linda Christian-Smith (1993a) which explores issues of agency, identity and power in relation to young women's reading practices. My analysis of the data from the pilot project, carried out in tandem with reading background literature, made me aware of the extent to which the young people in my initial study, who explored response with me outside of the classroom, drew on narrative as an interpretive frame for their own lives. Through reflection on the outcome of the pilot study, I decided that the adoption of an approach which embraced a range of contexts, would have greater potential to illuminate the complexity of response than a single focus and would enable me to build on the work of previous researchers. I decided to

redesign my research, incorporating three interwoven contexts: an individual study which would facilitate the indepth exploration of a particular reader's interaction with a range of texts, small group discussion in relation to voluntary reading outside of the classroom, which would afford me the opportunity to explore response from the perspective of the pupils themselves and a critical literacy project in the context of response to a class novel, with the pedagogical aim of developing pupils' critical and creative awareness.

The research questions which I address in the main study reflect the change in emphasis and are as follows:

- (1) What is the nature of the process that creates literary meaning?
- (2) What is the relationship between narrative representation and subjectivity?
- (3) How does the repertoire of the reader influence her response to narrative?
- (4) What is the nature of the interaction between the ideology inscribed in the text and the values of the reader, in the context of response to narrative?

In the initial study, I drew on a conceptual framework informed by reader response theory (Iser; 1978; Rosenblatt, 1968, 1978). However, it became apparent that this approach did not adequately address the social complexity of the classroom community nor take sufficient cognizance of the linguistic and cultural positioning of readers (Belsey, 1980) and the tension which may exist between personal response and the cultural context in which it is articulated. In the development of the main study, I have drawn on theory mapped across a range of practices including narratology, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism. In conceptualizing the relationship of language, ideology and subjectivity, I have drawn on the insights of the Russian theorists, Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), Medvedev (1978) and Voloshinov(1973).

Individual Response

For this part of my research, I wanted to carry out an in-depth study into an individual reader's response to a range of fictional texts and I initially considered asking for volunteers in school. However, I was aware of the problems this would create in terms of simply finding the time to carry out such a study in the course of a busy school day and even more daunting, the demands it would place on the child who volunteered in terms of committing herself to such an extended study. These difficulties were overcome when my youngest daughter Anna, then in her final year of primary school and an avid reader herself, volunteered to participate in my research. This was felicitous not just in personal terms; it also had obvious advantages in offering accessibility and flexibility. In addition, I felt that it would give me a research perspective different to that of teacher-pupil and from that point of view would enrich the whole project. Anna was (and is) a very committed reader who talked at length about the books she enjoyed, interspersing her discussion with comments about the nature of the reading process. Our conversations, which were audiotaped, took place several times a year and continued over a period of four years, from 1998 until 2002. Data collection consisted of these audiotaped conversations.

The Book Club

In the second strand of my research, which was located in St. Enda's, I focused on exploring response to voluntary reading by small groups of pupils in discussion with each other and myself. There were four groups in all, three from Year 8 and one from Year 9. Each group was made up of four or five pupils. I met with each group once a fortnight during term time at lunch break. When asking for volunteers, I had given a brief outline of the research in which I was engaged and I explained this in greater detail at my initial meeting with each group. The kind of questions I wanted to address related to the nature of the process that creates literary meaning, the interplay between the ideology inscribed in the text and the values of the reader, the ways in which response is influenced by the repertoire the reader brings to the text and the relationship between narrative, representation and subjectivity. In addition to discussing the books, my Year Eight volunteer readers agreed to keep a journal in which they recorded their thoughts about the books they had been reading in relation to a

number of questions we had agreed beforehand. The data obtained from these journal entries is central to my conceptualization of the role of the reader as that of spectator and participant (Harding, 1967, 1977).

In the report, I also focus on one of the groups who volunteered to participate in the research on voluntary reading at the beginning of Year 9 and continued over a period of two years. This particular group, the composition of which I describe in some detail in the report, *The Cool Web*, was the most committed and in terms of triangulation, through their discussions on the class text and our approaches to studying it, gave me a useful insight into the work from the perspective of a sample of pupils.

Data Collection

In relation to voluntary reading, my encounters with respondents took the form of conversations rather than interviews; although there were particular questions I wanted to ask, our discussions were generally open ended, leaving possibilities for new insights and directions. All of our conversations were audiotaped, with the permission of respondents. I tried to do this in a fairly unobtrusive way and students soon became accustomed to the procedure and appeared to lose any self consciousness they may have felt about it initially. Data consisted of these audiotaped conversations and, as earlier stated, the journal entries in which my Year Eight volunteer readers recorded their thoughts about the books they had been reading.

Shared Reading: the Class Text.

The third strand of my research, which centred on response to a shared text, was carried out in the autumn term of 1998 with two Year 10 classes. Drawing on a model of critical pedagogy, I wanted to explore the dialogical interaction between reader and text, focusing on the interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology of the text. The novel we chose was *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980) as it had been very popular with the classes which had studied it in the pilot project and I considered that it offered opportunities for developing students' understanding of the complex ways in which culture is negotiated and

extending their critical awareness of the constructedness of texts through ideology critique (Giroux, 1984).

Collection of Data

Students had the opportunity to work collaboratively in small group discussions, drama and role play, as well as sharing their responses in dialogue journals (Hackman, 1987). Data was collected using a variety of methods, including audiotaped group and class discussions, drama scripts and written responses in dialogue journals. In Research Report C, I focus on students' written responses in their journals.

The Context of School Based Research.

The research was carried out in Saint Enda's, which is located in Lurgan, a small market town on the shore of Lough Neagh, about fifteen miles south of Belfast. The late 1990s was a time of considerable political turbulence in Northern Ireland, a roller coaster of highs and lows which encompassed the reinstatement of the IRA ceasefire in 1996, the annual 'Drumcree' crises, invariably followed by waves of violence, the Good Friday agreement and the Omagh bomb. The town in which the school was situated bordered on the tip of the 'murder triangle', an area notorious for sectarian killings. It was a time of high tension as well as jubilation in which the issues of political and cultural identity were foregrounded.

The research took place against a background of increasingly conservative curriculum pressures, ongoing technological and cultural change and a highly unstable political situation, all of which suggested the need for the development of a questioning classroom which would create opportunities for critical engagement with texts and allow students to create links between their own cultural framework and that of the narrative.

St Enda's (a pseudonym).

St Enda's, which opened in 1959, is a medium sized, 11-16 all girls' school located in Lurgan. The majority of pupils reside either in the town or

surrounding countryside and the school has a good reputation in terms of both pupil attainment and pastoral care. Classes in Years 8, 9 and 10 are divided into three bands, top, middle and remedial. The system of education in Northern Ireland is selective, with admission to grammar or secondary school determined by performance in the 11 plus exam. However, in the area where I teach, an alternative to the 11 plus system has developed which includes automatic transfer from primary to secondary school and delayed selection at age 14, at which point just over fifty percent of our Year 10 pupils transfer to the local grammar school and the remaining pupils stay with us for a further two years. Following the Burns report (DENI, 2001) the selective system of education is under review.

The Researcher

My study was carried out in St. Enda's, the school in which I have been a teacher and Head of English for a considerable number of years. My account is a particular perspective on that world which is influenced by the 'repertoire' I bring to the research, my beliefs, attitudes, values and experience. Qualitative research relies on the engagement of the Self (Ball, 1993) and the development of rapport, empathy and trust with participants is crucial in the process of constructing a shared reality. I would argue that it is through dialogic interaction between students and researcher that meanings are negotiated and fine-tuned. My interest in the relationship between educational theory and practice developed through my studies for an MA degree with the Open University, my experience as an OU assistant lecturer, my involvement in Curriculum Development and my participation in the Doctorate in Education programme. My approach to the research has of course been greatly influenced by my provenance as an English teacher and the ways in which my own views have evolved in the context of an ongoing and frequently acrimonious debate about what it actually means to be an English teacher, a debate in which the opinions of teachers themselves are frequently marginalised (Davison J. and Moss J., 2000). In an innovative and detailed 'unofficial guide', Marshall (2000) invites English teachers to locate themselves in the debate, by identifying with one of five philosophical stances underpinning approaches to the subject, which she defines as Old Grammarians, Pragmatists, Liberals, Technicians and Critical Dissenters. The group for which I feel the greatest

empathy, and whose philosophy seems to match my own most closely, is that of the Critical Dissenters. The features identified by Marshall, which I consider to be characteristic of my own practice, include the idea of student empowerment (which has developed from the notion of personal voice), the concept of a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice, commitment to the idea of democratic entitlement, and emphasis on group work and discussion. I am especially interested in the debates surrounding issues of identity, ideology and representation in relation to narrative fiction. As an English Teacher, I consider that response to narrative has an important role to play in the development of learning (Chambers, 1995, Meek, 1988). I believe that by developing my understanding of the interaction between reader and text, by listening to what young readers say about the cultural experience of reading and by building my knowledge about narrative fiction, I can construct a critical theory of literacy which draws on the actual reading experiences of the young people themselves and enhances my classroom practice.

Analysis of Data

I began the process of data analysis by focusing on the data gathered from each strand of the research in turn, listening to tapes, transcribing them and scanning the written material. Theorization began with the identification of key words and phrases. The process was dialogical in that the emerging written analysis suggested new patterns and themes in a spiral of 'escalating insights' (Lacey, 1993, p. 125). The design of the research enabled me to make a comparative analysis across three different contexts. For example, the double state of mind experienced by Anna in her engagement with the imaginary world of the story, found resonances with the duality of the reader's role encapsulated by my Year Eight students in their journal entries. In relation to the classroom study, my analysis was based on students' written responses in their journals, to questions relating to issues of representation, ideology and identity in the context of narrative fiction.

Having discussed in some detail the design of the research, the procedures I adopted in its implementation and the context in which it was carried out, I will now go on to address pertinent methodological issues, beginning by considering the nature of the relationship between research and practice and

then going on to explore ontological and epistemological issues relating to the genre of critical ethnography.

The Relationship between Theory and Practice.

One of the key questions in the conceptualization of research focuses on the nature of the relationship between theory and practice. The issue of the nature of this relationship has been foregrounded by the refutation of positivism (Eisner, 1991), which has given rise to a theoretical debate and reassessment of methodologies and epistemologies (Anderson, 1989). This has been accompanied by a reconceptualization of professional practice. Schon (1983) argues that reflection-in-action contributes to a practitioner's repertoire of situated knowledge and this enhances her capacity to deal effectively with any problems which arise in the course of her work. Schon advocates that the practitioner develop a kind of double vision in which she is simultaneously engaged in a situation but also in tune with its '*back talk*' (Schon, 1983, p.164). In conceptualizing the relationship between theory and practice, Carr (1995) draws on the notion of 'praxis' as posited by Aristotle. He defines this as practical action, informed by practical philosophy, a process which is continually being re-interpreted through dialogue and discussion, requiring a form of reasoning in which choice and judgement play a crucial role.

As I have outlined, there are three strands in my research; the first strand is an individual case study, the second investigates group response in relation to voluntary reading and the third focuses on response to a class text. My research has a dual purpose; as reader, I want to explore the nature of the interaction between reader and text and I would argue that the understanding I develop in the process enhances my teaching. As teacher, I am interested in the development of critical and creative response to the text thus improving my practice. While there is no doubt that the interaction between myself as reader and myself as teacher increases the methodological complexity of the research, I would argue that the interplay actually enhances the quality of the educational project. In relation to the first strand of my research, the section on Anna's response to narrative, I have drawn on case study methodology (Stake, 1995). The focus of my study, in relation to Anna, is on the particularity and the complexity of her response. In terms of the depth of her analysis, she is

perhaps not typical but I would argue, following Stake (1995), that the intricacies and nuances of the atypical case can deepen our understanding and generate valuable insights.

I have characterized my research as action research in the general sense of the term in that my purpose is to improve my practice, directly through the educational project of empowering readers and indirectly through the exploration of the interplay between texts and readers in the creation of meaning. I have located my research in the genre of critical ethnography, defining it as *critical* in terms of its emancipatory orientation in that it is directed at the transformation of educational practice through dialogue, interaction and collaboration. In my view, the relationship between educational theory and practice is symbiotic; they are 'mutually constitutive elements in a dynamic developing and integrated whole' (Carr, 1995, p. 103).

I shall now go on to discuss issues relating to the criteria for validity, drawing on a framework which enlists the techniques of reflexivity, triangulation (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and reciprocity (Lather, 1986). Finally, I shall consider the ethical issues raised by the research before going on to present my report.

The Hermeneutical Circle

From the moment a piece of research concerns the text (and the text extends very much further than the literary work), the research itself becomes text, production (Barthes, 1975, p.198).

In exploring reflexivity in relation to my research, I shall consider the ways in which research acts to construct the world, the textuality of the research process and the interplay between theory and data. I have defined my study as praxis oriented, educative research, a tradition characterized by a sensitive and self-critical subjective perspective which is committed to emancipatory change (Gitlin *et al.*, 1993). This approach refutes objective-subjective dualism as neither feasible nor desirable, reconceptualizing the criteria by which praxis oriented research is judged, in ways that recognize the illusionary nature of value free, neutral research and which match the subtlety, complexity and

nuances of social interactions. Emancipatory research then is a *self-conscious* process which asserts that subjectivity, or more specifically, *intersubjectivity* is central to its methodological potency; it recognizes that ethnographic research is located within particular frameworks of understanding and aims to make them explicit, putting the researcher back into the research. I have characterized the reader as being engaged in a process of participation and evaluation and I would argue that this is analogous to the role of the researcher, who must immerse herself in the research while at the same time developing a heightened awareness of the nuances of social interaction, a technique which Ball (1993) claims enhances methodological rigour.

My research is a construction, not only from the point of view that it creates the reality that it represents, but also in that it aims to change that reality through transformative pedagogy. It is also a construction in that the dialogical interaction in which I engaged with participants, in relation to narrative fiction, influenced our response to the texts we discussed, generating new insights and fresh ideas (Culler, 1981). My research is also presented in the form of a text which utilizes rhetorical forms and devices (Barone, 1995). Geertz (1993) compares the enterprise of ethnography to that of literary criticism, arguing that it can be considered fictional in that it is 'a transformative act of the imagination' (ibid, p.15), imposing coherence on the flux of experience. I would argue that there is no access to 'pure reality'; all reality is mediated by symbolic representations which can be perceived as part of that reality since they contribute to our perception of it. We are all located in a hermeneutical circle, shaping and shaped by the texts with which we engage. I would hope that the text I have produced might be considered dialogic in relation to the interplay between actual voices and narrative voices, the 'choral vitality' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.xxxiii) of voices in discussion and the myriad echoes of intertextual voices, those who are 'heard in the word before the author comes upon it' (Bakhtin, 1986, p.122).

Data and Theory

My research is a form of educative action research (Gitlin, *et al.*, 1993) which seeks to transform educational practice through empowering participants in becoming critical, reflective and autonomous. In my study, I focus on the relationship between social structure, ideology, text and reader in the context of

practice both inside and outside of the classroom, and in exploring the nature of that relationship, I have drawn on a range of theoretical perspectives including cultural theory and reader response. I see the research process as the intricate interweaving of theory and data. As Barthes (1975, p.10) reminds us, this ‘“I” which approaches the text is already a plurality of other texts’ and it would be neither desirable nor possible to separate data from the particular framework of theoretical presuppositions in which the researcher is located. I have characterized research as a process of constructing reality and I would contend that the interplay of theory and data play a substantial part in its composition. Theory and data interanimate one another in the creative act of interpretation which informs the ongoing dialogical interplay in the spiral of planning, acting and reflecting as theory impacts on and modifies classroom practice. The challenge facing the ethnographic researcher is to combine the flexibility, creativity and emancipatory potential of this approach with the need for lucidity, precision and methodological rigour (Lather, 1986; McRobbie, 1982). To enhance rigour, Ball (1993, p.37) suggests ‘naturalistic sampling’, in terms of places, times and individuals. My research was carried out over a number of years with the same participants and so the ongoing nature of the interactions helped to iron out the vicissitudes of the weekly cycle, the ‘Monday morning, Friday afternoon’ syndrome. As I have already argued, relationships are of crucial importance in this type of research and the longitudinal nature of the study facilitated the negotiation of meaning. In relation to the school based research on voluntary reading, the fact that our discussions took place outside of the framework of the classroom had a positive impact on pupils’ perceptions of me and this fed back into the classroom situation. What can also help in establishing rigour is the dialogical epistemology of action research, its participatory and collaborative methodology, which values openness to ideas, commitment to discussion and concern for independent thinking. The shaping of data should be a product, not just of the skills and imagination of the researcher, but a shared enterprise involving both researcher and participants. I regard the theory building produced through my research as dialogical, a collaborative process of ‘reaccentuation’, (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 421), in which a range of different voices interanimated each other. This will be exemplified in Anna’s conceptualization of the story as a crucible for development or Clodagh’s suggestion that rereading captures ‘the reconstruction of the felt past in the present’ (Chodorow, 1989, p.4). The dialogical approach leaves theory

open to counter interpretations. I offer one example of this. In our discussions on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Holder, 1998), I was keen to suggest that pupils' engagement with this text was linked to the notion of 'girl power' but they resisted this theoretical perspective, insisting that what was of much more salient concern to them was the enactment of teenage issues in the Buffy text. I offer this as one small example of how collaborative theorizing can be illuminative.

I have argued that the *dialogical* structuring of research, the adoption of a shared collaborative approach to theorizing can enhance rigour, lucidity and precision. I shall now go on to discuss triangulation, another technique which has the potential to enhance the authenticity of research.

Triangulation

Triangulation is critical in establishing the trustworthiness of data and I shall argue that the design of my research and the fact that it is part of a wider critical enterprise assisted in the process of triangulation.

My research focuses on three contexts in relation to engagement with texts: an individual case study, group discussion of voluntary reading and response to a shared class text. Each of these is interwoven and each has illuminated the other. For example, some of my discussions with Anna took place at a time when she was moving from primary to secondary school, an experience she described as 'growing down'. Her encapsulation of that experience made me see how central it was in the lives of Year 8 students, with whom I was also having conversations about books. It made me aware of the importance of linking their prior experience of narrative to their current reading, to create a sense of continuity between the worlds of primary and secondary school. In addition, one of the groups with whom I discussed voluntary reading also commented during our lunchtime meetings about the approaches we had adopted in relation to the shared class text. Through their 'thick' description, (Denzin, 2001, pp.98-118), I caught a vivid glimpse of the intricate social networks within their classroom community, a culture in which pupils took centre stage and teachers had walk-on parts. My own observation cast further light on the group dynamics involved and helped me to fine - tune classroom

management in relation to our work on the novel. Another form of triangulation which is relevant relates to the fact that the Doctorate in Education is a collective critical endeavour which gives access to the wider research community in terms of intellectual resources, electronic conferencing and seminars on a wide range of research issues.

I shall now go on to discuss the need for reciprocity in relation to educative research.

Reciprocity

I have defined the study which I carried out as praxis oriented, educative action research with the pedagogical aim of facilitating learners in becoming critical, reflective and autonomous. I have also designated it, in terms of construct validity, as a collaborative enterprise in which we engaged in dialogical theory building. Lather (1986, p.272) proposes another criterion for judging research, that of 'catalytic validity' which she defines as:

the degree to which the research process reorients,
focuses and energizes participants toward knowing
reality in order to transform it.

Action research is empowerment through change and I would argue that my study gave pupils the opportunity, through their discussions about texts, to participate in a 'critical culture', exploring the relationship between lived and imagined experience, discovering new dimensions in reading, learning to 'read against the grain', a collaborative endeavour which Margaret Meek argues 'is the key to children's intellectual growth' (Meek, 1996, p.90). The research opened up a shared 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978 p. 102), enabling us to learn from each other and reflect on what we had learned. Vygotsky (1962, p.126) suggests that thought 'does not merely find expression in speech; it finds reality and form'. This idea is echoed by Anna, in her written comment on her participation in the research:

When you're reading a book and after you've finished it, ideas flit like shadows across your mind. Talking about the book actually shapes your ideas and gives them substance.

In her evaluation, Jeanette highlights the importance of context in learning and captures the idea of language as both individual and social (Vygotsky, 1962), when she writes:

What I really enjoyed about being in the book club was being able to express my feelings about books because I was with my friends who love reading as much as I do and I could talk without being taunted. I think I learnt a great deal from sharing ideas with other people.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that good research involves participants in educating themselves and in playing an active role. My first year students became enthusiastic about the idea of doing research and decided to carry out their own. They interviewed teachers and wrote to authors and politicians asking them about their favourite children's books. They incorporated technology into their research using a digital camera and a software package for manipulating images. A display of their work was exhibited in the school for World Book Day, 2001 and I was able to utilize the project as the completion task for my NOF training, the Open University Learning Schools Programme (see Appendix A).

Ethical Issues

The focus of my research is on the interplay between the ideology of the text and the values of the reader. I have characterized my study as critical and emancipatory; such a stance makes it incumbent on me, not only to ensure that the research is conducted within a framework of values but to identify and respond to ethical dilemmas as they occur in the course of the study (Soltis, 1989).

The general principles which I considered should govern the conduct of the research, relate to the desirability of openness, the negotiation of consent, the need for confidentiality and the provision of equal opportunities in relation to

participation in the research. I explained the purpose of the study to all potential participants and asked for the co-operation of the young people involved. All those who participated in the discussion of wider reading volunteered to do so after the purpose of the research was explained. In the process of data collection, class discussions as well as individual and group interviews were audiotaped with the agreement of participants; I played back some of the tapes at their request, as well as showing readers samples of transcripts. I promised that data would be treated confidentially and assured participants that individuals would not be identified or named without prior agreement. As a teacher who is committed to equal opportunities, I was careful to afford both top and middle band pupils equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of school based research.

I have characterized my classroom research as praxis oriented and educative. In relation to this type of research, it is important to achieve a balance between the needs of the research and the demands of other aspects of the curriculum. It is also crucial for emancipatory research that purpose and method are in alignment (Gitlin *et al.*, 1993). I have designated my research as emancipatory in that I am committed to facilitating learners in becoming critical, reflective and autonomous. This requires the development of a dialogical community in which all participants are committed to the open exploration and interchange of ideas. Such an endeavour is of course aspirational and requires very careful management, especially in the discussion of politically sensitive topics such as those which arise in the novel *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980), in the diverse interpretive community of the classroom. In communicating with others, we must assume the possibility of openness and work towards the 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1970, p.372). Nevertheless, as Bakhtin (1986) reminds us, all acts of communication are imbricated with asymmetries of power and I will now consider how the power dynamic may have impacted on my research. The theorization of the act of communication by the Russian socio-historical writers Bakhtin (1986) and Voloshinov (1973) is complex and subtle. It is premised on the dialogical principle that all meaning is interactive, 'an electric spark that occurs only when two different terminals are hooked together' (Voloshinov, 1973, p.103). There is no such thing as 'an abstract addressee' (Voloshinov, 1983, p.85). Dialogic exchange is power inscribed, the balance of power is determined by the relationship between speaker and interlocutor

and power plays a pivotal role in determining the quality of the utterance. A crucial marker of any utterance is its addressivity; all response is 'oriented towards a future answer word' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.279). In addition to speaker and interlocutor, Bakhtin proposed a third category of addressee, the 'superaddressee',

an invisibly present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986, p.126).

Drawing on Bakhtinian theory, I would argue that in the context of qualitative research, we must acknowledge the role of the power dynamic in shaping dialogue. As Maybin (1993) reminds us, literacy practices are key locations for the interplay of power relationships and the negotiation of identity. In my research, there are clearly asymmetrical power relationships between myself as teacher researcher and research participants as pupils. These are part of a complex network involving peer relationships as well as teacher-pupil relationships. There are also methodological complexities inherent in the relationship between Anna and myself in that I am teacher, parent and researcher. The conversations that I had with all the young readers who participated in my research cannot be divorced from the contexts in which they occurred and I use context in the broad sense of the word, not just to refer to the immediate situation but to all the intertextual nuances of the cultural settings invoked through the talk. Bakhtin posits the view that in a relationship characterized by trust and confidence, 'the speaker reveals his internal depths' (1986, p.97). I would argue that the closeness of the relationship between Anna and myself created a context in which she was willing to share in depth her reflections on the books she had read. The complexity of her analysis, the coherence of her arguments, her commitment to the text all point, I would contend, to critical and creative reflection. A similar argument can be applied to my volunteer 'book club' readers who featured in the report *The Cool Web*. I built up a relationship with them over a period of two years, outside the environs of the classroom; the informality of the setting, the relaxed atmosphere, the development of a shared framework of understanding, appeared to imbue pupils with the confidence to engage in genuinely exploratory talk in response to narrative fiction.

Transcript

Where the tape was indecipherable, I simply did not use it.

‘...’ indicates where a speaker pauses.

In this chapter I have focused on methodological issues, beginning by giving an account of the design of the research, the procedures adopted in its implementation, the context in which it was carried out and my own perspective as a researcher. I have considered the relationship between theory and practice and examined issues relating to validity, drawing on a framework enlisting the techniques of reflexivity, triangulation (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and reciprocity (Lather, 1986). Finally I have considered ethical issues pertinent to the study.

I shall now present the first part of my research report, ‘Imaginary Journeys’.

5. RESEARCH REPORT A: IMAGINARY JOURNEYS

Actual Minds, Impossible Worlds.

It is we, given that the mind can provide imaginary representations of impossible worlds, who ask things to be what they are not (Eco, 1999, p.56).

Anna was ten years old and in her final primary school year when she agreed to participate in my research project. An avid reader of fiction, she had achieved an 'A' grade in the eleven plus exam and was excited at the prospect of going to secondary school the following September. Our discussions about reading took place several times a year, over a period of four years. The extended time scale of the research allowed greater opportunity for the dialogical interplay between research literature and data; it afforded more time for reflection on the data and, in relation to the main focus of the study, it facilitated the recognition of patterns, relationships and connections in the context of response to narrative fiction. All our conversations were taped and each one lasted about an hour. During our discussions, Anna talked about a wide range of books, some of which she had chosen herself, others I had suggested to her and some her teacher had selected as class readers. She interspersed her commentary with observations about the nature of the reading process, the role of the reader and the interplay between actual and imagined experience. In our very first conversation, which took place on December 12th 1998, when Anna was ten years old, she reflected on her earlier reading experience. Her reflections showed a burgeoning understanding of how literary practice constitutes a significant form of cultural capital in our society (Bourdieu, 1973; Iser, 1989) and an implicit awareness of reading as a means for the construction and negotiation of identity:

Anna: Once you've started reading, it's wonderful being able to read by yourself. Whenever I think of learning to read, it's really strange I remember one instance when we used to have these books where you had to stick in words and we used to have to learn how to spell them and know them. I enjoyed that because you could show off, if you know what I

mean and I can remember one time in P3, I had caught onto big words and in one of our books, there was a story about how these three children had been left alone on a boat and the teacher asked us how they might have felt, and I came out with big words like 'forlorn' and 'neglected' and the teacher was delighted, and I got a bit of a kick out of that!

She was also becoming aware of reading as a tool for developing and enriching her own imaginative resources through envisioning alternative worlds and the ideological implications of the ways in which these symbolic worlds were constructed. In P4 and 5, her class had read *The Worst Witch* (Murphy, 2001), which she remembered as:

a really brilliant story. It was very good because it inspired your imagination. I liked it because it had witches, good witches, in it and I also liked being able to make up what they looked like but once you got in to the other books, you were able to use your imagination more.

Although she remembered the pleasure she had experienced in being able to read by herself, she also enjoyed listening while the teacher read to the class, focusing on the:

pictures in my imagination, .. the magic of Christmas in the wild wood, the wonderful talking animals in *The Sheep Pig* (King-Smith, 1985).

The Hedgehog (King-Smith, 1989), another favourite, was interesting because of the narrative device of defamiliarisation:

The hedgehogs lived in a world of their own. It was as if we were the hedgehogs and human beings were strange and that was good!

One of the books Anna remembered most clearly and which had made a considerable impression on her was *At the Back of the North Wind* (1984

[1871]) by George MacDonald, which she had read when she was ten years old. I was especially interested in her comments on this particular book as I had read it myself as a child and although I remembered little of the actual detail of the story, what had stayed with me was a sense of the atmosphere, the mystical, dream like quality of the story. Anna described it as a *Heidi* (Spyri, 1995[1881]) kind of book and although she did not elaborate on why she had made this intertextual link, in the context of the discussion which followed, I interpreted it as meaning that the tenor of the story was optimistic and life affirming.

George MacDonald was one of the great 19th century fantasy writers for children. *At the Back of the North Wind* is perhaps his most famous book; it tells the story of *Diamond*, the son of a coachman, who leads two lives, one in the harsh conditions of Victorian London, the other flying through the night on all kinds of strange adventures with the *North Wind*, depicted as a mysterious and beautiful Madonna-like figure with flowing black hair who nurtures the child *Diamond*:

who was entranced by her mighty beauty (1984, p.15).

The tension between the two worlds creates a powerfully imaginative story in which MacDonald, through a blend of fantasy and realism, questions normative assumptions about the nature of reality.

In conceptualizing the relationship between the discourse of the novel and the discourse of its socio-cultural context, we can draw on dialogical theory. Bakhtin (1981) theorizes that the actual world and the represented world are:

indissolubly tied up with each other (Bakhtin, 1981, p.255).

The author is:

located as it were tangentially to the reality he describes
(ibid., p.255).

The relationship between the author and his socio-cultural context is dialogical:

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewal of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers (Bakhtin, 1981, p.254).

Literary practices, I would argue, cannot be divorced from the extra-literary cultural formation in which they are produced; there is ongoing dialogic interaction between the discourse of the novel and the discourse of life and the relationship between childhood and its representation in literature is profoundly ideological. In relation to the fantasy, *At the Back of the North Wind*, the ideology inscribed within the text represents a dialogic relationship between the competing discourses of Evangelism and Romanticism. MacDonald was brought up as a Calvinist and for a time worked as a Congregationalist minister. He later resigned his ministry and devoted himself to writing. In his fiction he blends fairytale and fantasy with religion in a Utopian vision which is essentially platonic, reflecting belief in a reality which lies beyond this world and is apprehensible through faith. I have argued that notions of the child are cultural constructions produced in a particular socio-historical context. The image of the child represented in the novel, *At the Back of the North Wind* draws on the discourse of Romanticism. The protagonist, *Diamond*, embodies the Romantic ideal of childhood innocence and spirituality, a visionary symbol in the critique of industrialism. Like his contemporaries, Charles Dickens, Hesba Stretton, and Charles Kingsley, MacDonald was deeply concerned about the plight of children in Victorian London. In 1851, the journalist, Henry Mayhew, had published *London Labour and the London Poor*, an influential sociological survey in which he documented the day to day existence of the poor in the East End of London in the middle of the 19th Century. A contemporary critic, William Makepeace Thackeray described Mayhew's account as:

a picture of London life so wonderful, so awful, so piteous and pathetic, so exciting and terrible, that readers of romance

own they never read anything like it, and that the griefs, struggles, strange adventures here depicted exceed anything that any of us could imagine. (Thackeray, cited in Mayhew, (1996, [1851] p.xii).

One of the groups Mayhew included in his survey were the crossing sweepers, many of them children, who eked out a scant living by clearing a path through the mud and filth for people to cross the roads. One of the characters in MacDonald's book is *Nanny*, a little girl who works as a crossing sweeper in Regent Street and whose home is a dark cellar which she shares with her irascible grandmother, who is frequently incapacitated by her fondness for cheap gin. *Nanny* is represented as a feisty, resilient character, befriended by *Diamond*, who is instrumental in rescuing her from the appalling conditions in which she lives. *Nanny's* transformation from 'a rough girl into a gentle maiden' (1984, p.223), is wrought through the beneficence of *Diamond's* wealthy benefactor, *Mr Raymond*, who offers *Diamond's* family as well as *Nanny* and her friend *Jim*, a lame crossing sweeper, a home in the country and employment as domestic servants. The solution in symbolic terms to the problem of poverty is a philanthropic one, inscribing the ideology of transformation through individual action.

The child rearing practices advocated through the idealized representation of little *Diamond's* family life are more radical and reflect the change in attitude to childhood in the mid 19th century. However, as Cunningham (1995) points out, Romanticism was more influential as a body of ideas than as a force which had a direct influence on children's lived experience. The disjuncture between the Romantic ideal and the actuality of childhood experienced by children of the poor, is reflected in the contrast between *Diamond's* idealized fictional childhood and that of *Nanny* and *Jim*.

In his relationship with his implied reader, MacDonald prefigures the writings of reader response and cultural theorists in their emphasis on the dynamic role of the reader. In *The Fantastic Imagination* (1975), one of MacDonald's collection of essays, we are given an insight into his understanding of the nature of the reading process as dialogic interplay:

Everyone who reads the story will read its meaning after his own meaning and development. One man will read one meaning in it, another will read another it may be better than you should read your meaning into it. That may be a higher operation of your intellect than the mere reading of mine out of it; your meaning may be deeper than mine (MacDonald, 1975, p.29).

The dynamic role of the reader in negotiating imaginative entry into the world of the story, is explored by Anna in her response to the text:

Anna: *Diamond* lived with his parents in London and at night he was taken up by the *North Wind* and carried all these different places. I thought it was really magical because whenever you're asleep you have dreams and things and when you're reading it at night you actually feel as if you're being carried by the *North Wind* and it tells of times whenever the *North Wind* saves people in distress. I thought it was a really brilliant feeling.

R: So you feel as if, in your imagination, you're accompanying the boy who is carried by the *North Wind*?

Anna: No, you actually feel like the person who is being carried by the *North Wind*. You don't feel as if you're with that person, you feel as if you are that person, and sometimes whenever the book becomes a little strange, and you don't really like being that person, you sort of escape back and try to watch what's going on.

R: Can you remember any particular thing that you found a bit strange? And you didn't like the feeling of being there?

Anna: Whenever the boy was left out in the cold, waiting for the *North Wind*. I didn't really like that because I was waiting for the part whenever he would go into the magical

land and just waiting out there in the cold, I didn't like being in that situation.

R: And what did you do then?

Anna: Just watching, just watching what's happening. While you're reading, you're also thinking of alternatives. When it gets more magical you want to go back, but then wherever it goes from magical to strange, you kind of imagine yourself on a sort of cloud; you know you don't have to be there – that's the lovely thing about reading a book, you don't have to be there if you don't want to, whereas in normal everyday life there's going to be good things and bad things and you just can't pick all the good things and close yourself off from the bad things. I quite like the idea when I'm reading a book of feeling really comfortable. I think that's the reason that people try to be in a nice, comfortable, relaxed situation when they're reading – you wouldn't read when you're going down the free fall, (laughs), you wouldn't read on a roller coaster or in the middle of a busy street. People usually try to read in comfortable places; you might have a special place to read like a comfortable chair or in bed and then if you want to live in the book you can or you can imagine you're floating on a cloud above the story.

R: You liked the magic of it all, the power of the *North Wind*?

Anna: I liked to imagine that I was a part of the story and whenever something sad happened, I would maybe skip a few pages to find out if it turned out all right in the end. It was as if it was two different stories – the story about the boy and the *North Wind* and the story about the boy and the family and you were going from real to unreal. I didn't like the story with the family and I think what I tried to do was to

blank out the bits with the family because I didn't like that. I only liked the magical world of the *North Wind*.

R: Why did you not like the bits with the family?

Anna: Because it seemed it was enjoyable to be with the *North Wind* and I didn't like the bits about the family because they seemed sad in a way and whenever I think of the *North Wind*, I remember the magical bits – in my mind I can see this picture of waterfalls and mountains and a magical palace because I try to make the book as good and happy as possible.

In my view, what comes across most strongly in Anna's response is the dual nature of the reading process in which she is engaged, the double state of mind she experiences in her emotional engagement with the imaginary world of the story, identifying with the protagonist but at the same time maintaining a psychological distance, oscillating between the two roles of spectator and participant (Harding, 1977).

Fantasy is an expression of desire and the power of the magical world it creates is reflected in Anna's absorption in the dream vision of flying with the *North Wind* and her rejection of the realistic elements in the story which she attempted to 'blank out' from memory. The dream of flying is a common fantasy in children's literature and can be interpreted as representing the desire to overcome spatio-temporal constraints, to move beyond imposed limitations and to open up new possibilities. It can also be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the power of the imagination and of the reading process itself, as a transformative space outside the normative constraints of our world, 'a third area' mediating between inner and outer reality (Winnicott, 1971). The designation of this discursive space as an imaginative and creative realm, its focus on the nurturing, maternal figure of the *North Wind*, suggests a Kristevan reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Kristeva, 1986). In Lacanian theory, the subject is constituted in three registers which Lacan termed the 'Imaginary', the 'Symbolic', and the 'Real'. The Imaginary is a phase during which the child is close to the mother; it is followed by the child's entry into the symbolic 'Law

of the Father', the pre-given patriarchal language system. Kristeva characterizes the Imaginary, which she associates with sensuous, poetic language, as the 'feminine' or 'semiotic' and asserts its power to subvert dominant signifying practice. The flowing rhythmic nonsense verses sung by *Diamond*, with their repetition, alliteration and assonance, communicate a sense of joy and delight which transcends the rule bound system of the Symbolic Order and is more akin to inner speech, which Voloshinov terms, 'the semiotic material ... of consciousness (1973, p.14).

Drawing on psychodynamic theory, it is possible to interpret Anna's delight in the dream vision of flying with the *North Wind* as a desire for a return to the pre-symbolic state, the realm of the feminine imaginary (Kristeva, 1986). In her commentary, Anna emphasizes the need to find a special, comfortable place for reading. She jokes:

You wouldn't attempt to read going down the free fall.

Entry into the fictional world creates a third space, (Winnicott, 1971) where, emancipated from concern with physical comfort, the energizing function of the imagination, as embodied, in this case, in the figure of the *North Wind*, can be harnessed to recreate the story in the image of desire. The fantastic opens up a dialogue with the real (Jackson, 1981), creating a discursive space where the reader can experience the interplay between inner and outer reality, the world of the imagination and the world of lived experience (Vygotsky, 1971). The return to the Imaginary is neither regressive nor solipsistic but may be read as a sophisticated way of interpreting reality metaphorically rather than literally. Entry into the fictional world represents a withdrawal from the tensions of linear time into the metatemporal world of the dream, that configurational dimension of narrative which Ricoeur (1981) suggests deepens our experience of time and can be interpreted as a period of self-reflexivity which facilitates the move out of solipsism to greater personal and social awareness, an imaginary rite of passage.

At the microcosmic level the powerful evocation of the dream vision of flying with the *North Wind* opens up possibilities of enhanced autonomy and challenges imposed social and cultural limitations while offering the security of

a recuperative ending, the reassurance of fears overcome, danger escaped and the triumph of good over evil; at the macrocosmic level it may be read metafictionally as a metaphorical representation of the power of literature to challenge the utilitarian ideology of industrial capitalism (Eagleton, 1996, 2nd edn.).

The kind of books Anna enjoyed were narratives that ‘opened up new worlds’ and our next discussion centred on the dialogue between text and reader: the potential of narrative to open up a discursive space where subjectivity can be explored; the symbiotic relationship between actual and symbolic worlds; the multi-layered nature of the reading process.

Opening Up New Worlds: Narnia and Hogwarts.

Life never does more than imitate the Book (Barthes, 1977, p.147).

This discussion took place on March 20th, 2000 during Anna’s first year at St Cuthbert’s, a large co-educational grammar school. At the time of our conversation she was twelve years old. I asked Anna what books she had read since our previous discussions and she told me that she had read the *Narnia Chronicles* (Lewis, 1950-1956) and the *Harry Potter* books (Rowling, 1997-2003). I will begin by briefly introducing the *Narnia Chronicles* before going on to discuss with Anna the interplay between lived and imaginary experience in relation to these narratives.

The Narnia Chronicles:

The *Narnia Chronicles* were written by C.S. Lewis, an author and critic born in Belfast in 1898. As a young adult, he was introduced to the writings of the poet and novelist, George MacDonald, whose work made a great impact on him. The creation of *Narnia* is described in *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955), its discovery by Lucy Pevensie in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and its ending in *The Last Battle* (1956). The narrative can be read as a Christian allegory, encapsulating the triumph of good over evil through the mediation of *Aslan* and it can also be read metafictionally as an allegorical

representation of the power of the imagination to open up new worlds. Anna avoided reading *The Last Battle* because:

it's too final really; its as if it all comes to an end, as if *Narnia* doesn't exist anymore and I don't want to feel as if it's all over.

Just after she had started her new school, Anna confided that she felt she had 'grown down' since leaving her primary school and I asked her how she felt about it now. She began by explaining why she had chosen to read those particular books and then went on to describe in detail how her reading of the narratives had helped her to cope with the problems she had experienced in adapting to her new school:

Anna: I was in first year when I read the *Harry Potter* and the *Narnia* books. I wasn't really all that happy and it gave me I would sit in the library in the morning and for thirty minutes, I would snap out of everything. I would just read the book and imagine it in my head. When I was younger I would read a book and I would sort of see images but they weren't complete pictures but now whenever I read books, that has developed and I see in my mind a complete picture of the whole place I'm reading about. Whenever you're reading a book, you go into the world of the book; its easy, very easy to just immediately react to it because all of the things the writer says, you immediately know the emotions they trigger but when you start school, you're not told the emotions you're supposed to feel, you know; its not all written on a page for you! Whenever you go into the *Harry Potter* world or the *Narnia* world, it's very, very easy to just click yourself into these completely different worlds and be acquainted with them immediately because that's the way they're written, so that you just jump into them and you lose all consciousness of time and I think that's great. I read the first *Harry Potter* book in first year and, you know, that was pretty good because they were going through the same

feelings and I knew I had the same feelings as they had in the story.

R: So you felt that actually helped you because you could understand how they felt, starting a new school?

Anna: Yeah, I think it helped me get more into the book. Everyone's experienced a first day at school, whether it's a first day at primary or a first day at secondary school or a first day at *something*, you know, and like, St Cuthbert's was a whole new world to me and I was reading the *Narnia* books and *Narnia's* a completely different world to them and they would have felt bewildered and not known who to trust and that sort of thing.

R: So do you think that reading these books helped you to understand and cope with your own feelings?

Anna: Yes I do, because I wasn't all that happy with the world I was living in, maybe not world, but the kind of life I was living and I felt I could transfer into the *Narnia* world or the *Harry Potter* world ... I loved the idea of going along on the Hogwart's train to the School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the idea of *Harry* being there and making friends and everything and I liked *Harry's* friends and stuff. If I had gone there, I would have wanted the same friends as him; it just seemed really fun and exciting In quite a few other books you're transferred into the book but in the *Harry Potter* world you feel completely secure; you don't have any real worries because you know that nothing can ever happen to *Harry* because he's being looked after by *Dumbledore* and nothing can happen to him when he's with *Dumbledore* so you feel really happy about that. It's like being in-between ; whenever you read a book, you're sort of in-between; there's reality and there's the book and then there's in-between – that's where you are and if you feel afraid of what's

happening in the book, you can jump back into the in-between space; it's like a sort of safety net and that makes you feel secure. You know that *Harry Potter* is going through the same kind of feelings as you are and it makes you feel much better. But I think that everyone interprets it in different ways I think that the reason a lot of adults read the *Harry Potter* books is because they're emotionally more developed and I think that's one of the reasons I enjoy them so much I think that I'm able to feel emotions quite deeply and as you get older I think that develops even more.

When I asked Anna if *Harry Potter* reminded her of any other books she had read, she responded immediately:

Yes, *Narnia*! JK Rowling must have read the *Narnia* books. *Aslan*, you know, the lion, is the person you can trust just as you know you can trust *Dumbledore*. You know that he will never, ever do anything wrong It's so obvious because the only person that *Voldemort* fears is *Dumbledore* and so there are links between *Aslan* and *Dumbledore*; they are like rocks or stones. They will never change and you will always be able to trust them.

I would argue that it is this sense of reassurance and consolation generated through interaction with the text, the conviction that come what may, good will triumph over evil, that resonates so strongly with young readers, striking at the roots of their deepest existential concerns. In the *Harry Potter* books, Rowling has constructed a fantasy world that is hugely appealing to young readers, drawing on mythology, legend and fairytale in creating a magical world filled with fabulous creatures, vampires, boggarts, talking hats and zany ghosts, subtly weaving primary and secondary worlds.

In her response to these narratives, Anna focuses on the relationship between real and imagined experience. The newness of the world of secondary school is paralleled in the newness of the symbolic worlds of *Narnia* and *Hogwarts*. The texts mirror the kind of narrative which Anna draws on in her construction of

her own subjectivity, in the context of a new and challenging experience, and offer experiential access to the ways in which the subjectivities of fictive characters are constructed through intersubjective relations (Stephens, 1992). The dialogic interweaving generated by this process is multi-layered. Anna stresses the emotional nature of her response (Rosenblatt, 1968). She is totally absorbed by the text and experiences a deep sense of reassurance from the knowledge that the fictional characters share similar feelings to those she is experiencing herself. She enters fully into the imaginary world of the narrative, sharing in the experience of the characters, imagining the kind of feelings they are experiencing, responding emotionally to their situation, while at the same time assessing it in terms of her own values and experience. I would suggest that Anna is acting out a dual role as spectator and participant. As onlooker, she is sharing imaginatively in the world of the story while tacitly evaluating it as it unfolds. The evaluative nature of her response is demonstrated in the following exchange:

R: How do you imagine yourself in the story? Do you see yourself walking alongside *Harry* or *Hermione*, for example? How do you *see* yourself in the story?

Anna: I think it depends. Sometimes you don't like the way *Harry's* acting you know what I mean ...and you jump to *Hermione*. At the start of the book, you hate the *Dursleys* so you obviously see things through *Harry's* eyes but then when he didn't really take to *Hermione* at the start, you sort of knew he was wrong so you liked *Hermione* best but most of the way throughout the story, you're seeing things through *Harry's* eyes.

Not only is Anna evaluating the actions and attitudes of the protagonists, I would argue that she is also, crucially, involved in a process of self-evaluation, exploring the implications of the textual world, the ideological significations it produces and the possible selves it envisions in terms of her own subjectivity and ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981). The 'third area' (Winnicott, 1971) which Anna describes as the 'in-between space', comparing it to a 'safety net', can also be reconceptualized in terms of Lacan's mirror phase. The reader is

creating, through the fictional world of the text, a 'possible self', visualizing her subjectivity as unified and coherent yet aware at the same time of the disjuncture between image and actuality, imaginary and symbolic. The 'third area' (Winnicott, 1971), that space which mediates between inner and outer reality, facilitates the interplay between lived and imagined experience.

Anna is a highly competent reader who can enter into the fictional world and describe in detail her experience, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of how literary codes operate. She is aware of the ideological and social dimensions of literary practice; her confidence as a reader who is familiar with the elaborate rules of the game gives her easy access to the fictional world (Meek, 1988). In her words:

It's very, very easy to just click yourself into this completely different world and be acquainted with it immediately ... all the things that the writer says, you immediately know the emotions they trigger.

For Anna, reading is a process which scaffolds her learning; it is a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978 p.102) which not only enhances her self concept as a learner, but as a form of symbolic action enables her to enter into a dialogue between the world of the book and the real life 'time - space where the world resonates' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.253).

Anna compares the experience of reading to a metaphorical journey which enriches her experience of life:

Anna: Well, whenever you're reading a book, it's like a journey, not only a journey in the physical sense, it's more like an emotional journey because whenever you read a book, you're sort of going through all those different emotions like ... it's like whenever you read about *Harry Potter* in his first year in school, there's a whole lot of different emotions because there's a whole lot going on in the book and so you feel a lot of different emotions so it's like a journey in that sense; you start off at one place and

when you're finished, you've actually gained from it because it adds to your experience of life.

R: You think reading enhances your experience of life?

Anna: Yes, I do, and not just in *Harry Potter*, although it might seem strange because he's a wizard and everything; it does add to your experience because you can feel the way he would feel, being a hero and so on. It gives you other people's perspective and I think it adds to your knowledge of how people feel.

Elaine Millard (1994, 1997) provides evidence of the gendered nature of response to narrative and this is supported by Sarland (1991), who argues that there is a distinction in response between girls and boys which he attributes to differences in enculturation. Girls, he suggests, read hero narratives differently, in particular they read for:

the relationships and the characterization ... they exploit ... the *plurality* of the text' (ibid., pp. 50-51).

A salient feature of Anna's response is the extent of her emotional involvement in the narrative (Rosenblatt, 1968), her fascination with the development of the characters and their inter-relationships. I asked her if she was mainly interested in *Harry* as a character or in the action of the story.

Anna: I actually think I'm interested in *Harry* as a character because he's sort of ... you feel sorry for him because of his background. I didn't really like his character at first whenever he started Hogwarts because I felt he was mean to *Hermione* and I quite liked her so I thought it was great when they all became friends; that really made the story so much better ... *Harry* has to be my favourite character now but I think *Hermione* is a really good character and *Ron* is as well.

R: Do you think *Harry's* personality changes between the world of *Muggles* and the world of *Hogwarts*. Or is it that people see him differently?

Anna: I think in a way his personality changes because he realises he's a wizard and he's happy about that and he gains more confidence. I suppose you don't really hear him speaking out much with the *Dursleys* but you do in *Hogwarts* and in *Hogwarts* they like him more and that helps to build his confidence so that he isn't as quiet as he might have been.

R: So you think *Harry* is responding to the ways in which people perceive him?

Anna: I do think so. It's the same with anyone because if someone doesn't like you, if everyone around you hated you, you wouldn't have much confidence about anything and all his life he'd been treated like that so I suppose when he went into *Hogwarts* where suddenly all these people liked him, it was really like magic. It made him feel much happier and he had friends for the first time in his life and it made him much more confident - he was no longer a runt.

In analysing Anna's response, it will be necessary to draw on Bakhtin's theorization of the chronotope:

the primary means of materializing time in space (Bakhtin, 1981, p.250).

The texts discussed by Anna, the *Narnia Chronicles* and *Harry Potter* narratives, belong to the fantasy genre in which time/space relations are particularly significant. The configurations of time/space relations in each of the texts differ. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) for example, time stands still in the primary chronotope while the characters are in the magical world of the secondary chronotope. In *Harry Potter*, on the other hand,

primary and secondary chronotopes are simultaneous although perception of time differs dramatically in each. In the one dimensional *Muggle* world, time is curiously static. Privet Drive is drab and dull, a spiritual and cultural wasteland; it contrasts sharply with the verve and dynamism of the magical world which is full of kinetic energy. The symbolic passage between the two chronotopes is through the door at the back of the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and through the quaintly named platform nine and three quarters, King's Cross Station in the *Harry Potter* books. Although in the latter, *Muggle* and magical worlds exist in parallel, *Muggles* are not aware of the existence of the magical world and as Anna points out, this serves as a device to authenticate the narrative:

Anna: In the *Harry Potter* stories, you could actually be a *Muggle* and not *know* about the magical world; you know as a reader that it *might* be there because *Muggles* don't know anything about the magical world.; they don't look hard enough and they don't listen hard enough ... it means that it *could* be true. You believe in it because the writer gives reasons why the *Muggles* don't understand it. If you consider *The Worst Witch* (Murphy,2001) story, for example, it's set in a completely different world but in the world of *Harry Potter*, witches and wizards mix with *Muggles* and there are a lot of references to the magical community's views on *Muggles*.

R: What effect do you think that has?

Anna: I think it makes you think that if the *Muggles* in the story don't know, then if *Harry Potter* really was real, they wouldn't know anyway and so it leaves it open, it creates an air of mystery.

The fluidity of the boundary between contrasting chronotopes has the effect of *subjunctivizing* reality (Bruner, 1986), offering a critique of the way in which time / space relationships are conceptualized, exposing through their differing timescales (Genette, 1980), the extent to which our perceptions of time / space

relations are mediated by culture and are inherently ideological. (Bakhtin, 1981; Levine, 1997).

The *Harry Potter* narratives unfold through a pattern of binary oppositions, the relativity of their time frames represented in the static nature of time in the *Muggle* world:

nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew on the front step but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all ... only the photographs on the mantelpiece showed how much time had passed (Rowling, 1997, p.19).

The stagnant nature of time in the world of *Muggledom* is associated with the withering of the imagination and its substitution by the threadbare matrix of consumer capitalism. *Mr* and *Mrs Dursley*, *Harry's* odious foster parents, take pride in their 'normality':

they were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense (ibid., p.7).

When *Mr Dursley* sees a stranger, a tiny little man dressed in a violet cloak, he finds himself:

hoping he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he didn't approve of imagination (ibid., p.10).

Mr Dursley's fixation with conspicuous consumption is represented in his indulgent attitude towards his son, *Dudley*, who threatens a temper tantrum when, having been presented with a plethora of expensive gifts on his birthday, he becomes aware that he has received two presents less than on his previous birthday:

“Little tyke wants his money’s worth just like his father”, he chortled, ruffling Dudley’s hair (ibid., p.21).

The inertia of the *Muggle* world is contrasted with the dynamism of the magical world, the realm of the imagination, where time like light is constantly in motion, flickering, fragmented, fluid, filled with epiphanies of the *extraordinary*. Having escaped from his obnoxious foster parents, *Harry Potter* sets off on a quest for selfhood into the magical world of Hogwarts. Platform nine and three quarters dissolves and there standing in front of *Harry* is the gleaming scarlet and gold Hogwarts Express. The giant, *Hagrid*, touches a wall with the point of his *pink* umbrella; the brick he has touched quivers, wriggles and an archway opens up:

‘Welcome’, said Hagrid, ‘to Diagon Alley’ (ibid., p.56).

Figures in portraits smile and speak, images in photos move. *Nearly Headless Nick*, the Elizabethan ghost, flips his hinged head on and off. Phantoms flit through the labyrinthine stone passages, straddling the border between life and death, their ambivalent ontological status blurring the boundaries between past, present and future, the actual and symbolic, implying a temporal dimension in which ‘things can be perpetual without being eternal’ (Kermode, 2000, 2nd edn, p.71). In the magical world, as in the world of *Muggledom*, discourses produce ideological signification but whereas in the primary world, such signification appears stultified, in the magical realm, it is in a process of flux. Imagination, like time, opens up a structure of possibility, symbolized in the narrative by the motif of effortless flying.

In generic terms, the *Harry Potter* series is a blend of school story, adventure and fantasy. It draws on conventional motifs in children’s literature. *Harry* is orphaned and endures a miserable childhood with the *Dursleys* but he is removed to a magical world where he is destined for greatness. The plot encapsulates the epic struggle between good and evil. However, good and evil are not represented in terms of absolute polarity; the relationship between them is shown to be complex but a key determinant is moral autonomy. *Dumbledore* advises the eponymous hero:

It is our choices, Harry, that show us what we truly are, far more than our abilities (Rowling, 1998, p.245).

As Bakhtin (1981) reminds us, chronotopes are mediated by culture and the pattern of events unfolds in a time / space relationship which is constantly changing. Conceptualizations of time / space relationships are shaped by socio-cultural contexts. I have argued that in the *Harry Potter* narratives, the world of the imagination is privileged and our rational, consumer oriented society is seen as potentially oppressive, thus subverting the dualism of home / wilderness inscribed in the traditional quest story. In some ways, *Harry* is an unlikely hero. He is described as:

small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he actually was because all he had to wear, were old clothes of *Dudley's* and *Dudley* was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with sellotape because of all the times *Dudley* had punched him on the nose (Rowling, 1997, p.20).

The language used to describe *Harry*, with its emphasis on his slight physical stature and vulnerability is the obverse of the traditional hero image and serves to raise questions about desirable masculinity and the relationship between signs and things. I asked Anna if she thought *Harry Potter* was a typical hero figure:

Anna: I don't actually because it's not as if he's always jumping in there with a big sword and stuff – it's not really like that and plus in the adventure part, *Hermione* and *Ron* both help him. In fact, he wouldn't be able to do it if it hadn't been for *Hermione* and *Ron*. Also, there's no way that *Hermione* is a 'damsel in distress'. She *knows* so much, she's so clever. She's actually much cleverer than *Harry* and *Ron*. She plays a major role on a lot of occasions. It's not as if the book is being sexist and claiming that the boys always come to the rescue. *Hermione* saves the day a number of times

because she helps with practical information and research and stuff. *Harry* needs *Hermione*. He wouldn't be able to do it without her.

Anna's response can be read as counter-hegemonic. She is exploiting 'the *plurality* of the text', (Sarland, 1991, p.51) reading it dialogically.

I have suggested that by drawing on the theoretical discourse of psychodynamics, in tandem with that of dialogism, we can illuminate our understanding of the relationship between narrative, ideology and subjectivity. In my analysis, I am arguing that a symbiotic relationship exists between the psychic and social worlds; parallels may be drawn between the insights of Vygotsky (1971), who has emphasized the social nature of learning and reminded us of:

the psychological kinship between art and play (1971, p.257),

and those of Winnicott (1971) who has suggested that play facilitates the development of intersubjectivity, creating 'a third area' situated between inner and outer reality. The hero narrative is psychologically satisfying, presenting the reader with idealized images of possible selves, not just in terms of individual characters but also in relation to the concept of different characters as representative of the different facets of the individual, matching those possible selves to her own construction of selfhood. The reader as onlooker shares imaginatively in the world of the story while tacitly evaluating that world as it unfolds; she is both participant and spectator. Anna elucidates the nature of that process through her metaphorical representation of the 'in-between' space, positioned between inner and outer reality which facilitates the interplay between reader and text, showing how actual and imagined experience is constructed through stories.

I have also argued that the relationship between reader and text is dialogical and *ideological*, drawing on the insights of Bakhtin (1981), Medvedev (1978) and Voloshinov (1973). The novel is a heteroglossic genre incorporating:

a multiplicity of social voices and socio-ideological discourses (Bakhtin, 1981, p.263).

This implies that a range of reader subject positions are inscribed within the text in dialogic relation to those discourses and voices. The plurality of the text opens up the possibility of resistant as well as consensual readings. The concept of the chronotope illuminates the extent to which the hero narrative is socially and culturally determined, shaped by the ideological discourses operational at any given time (Bakhtin, 1981). In my analysis of the relationship between narrative and ideology, I have argued that the interplay between reader and text is inherently ideological. The nature of that ideological interaction formed the focus of the following conversation with Anna, which took place on July 12th, 2000 when Anna was twelve years old.

Hunters and Gatherers of Values

The fact is that a third participant always meddles in the game, the listener, and he changes the inter-relationship between the two others (the creator and the hero)
(Medvedev, 1978, p.24).

I began by asking Anna if she thought that writers tried to influence children by encouraging them to believe in particular values:

Anna: I think they do, although a lot of writers would say that they don't set about writing morals but it is what they do, because they're certainly not going to encourage children to do things that are wrong. A lot of them value friendship in their stories, for example. Have you ever heard of *One Snowy Night* (Butterworth, 1989)? It's a book for younger children and it's about this park keeper called *Percy* and his animals. The story happens on a really cold winter's night and the different animals all arrive at his house, in twos, and he brings them in and looks after them. They sleep in shoes and in shoe boxes and under the stairs and even his very bed is filled with animals. I think the writer is really reflecting

friendship and kindness and how important it is to be considerate to people who are less well off than you, not just in terms of money but also in circumstances. I think that when you're writing your beliefs are definitely going to come through. You aren't going to go against your beliefs while you're writing. You're just going to speak the way you would normally speak. In *Who Ever Heard of a Vegetarian Fox?* (Kerven, 1990), I was actually angry with the author because you could tell that she was purposefully, *purposefully* setting out to make children believe that foxhunting was good and setting traps for animals was good.

R: In what ways did the writer do that?

Anna: She said that ...okay, through the story there were two children who had moved into the country and they were animal rights activists in a way. They tried to sabotage traps and they would damage and break them. Eventually they were caught by the woman who owned the property and she was very, very rich. She brought them into her house and said that ... she told them that they were completely wrong and she cut them down to size really, by telling them that, "O, no! Your information is wrong. The only reason we do this is because we love animals and we want to keep them here and the only way we can do that is by culling a certain number of them because we need the money from the people who come to hunt, to pay for the upkeep of the forests". Any child who read that, younger than me, might not realize that that was only one person's point of view.

R: You thought that was actually the writer's point of view and she was trying to influence the reader?

Anna: I do. I definitely think that she was. I think that she actually set about trying to change people's point of view in the first place. I don't think that she was just one of those

writers whose beliefs came through. I think she actually, purposefully, tried to ... I think she saw herself as that character in the book.

R: Right, and what about the two children? Did they change their views as a result of what she said to them?

Anna: They did in a way. They pretended that they didn't but you could see that the way that she put it, the way the writer put it, you could see that they did change their views and the book could have changed other children's views if they hadn't realized that the owner could have done other things for the upkeep of the forest. She could have opened up a café, she could have invited people to come round and visit the different places, like a wildlife reserve for example and you could get a grant for that but she never mentioned any of that.

R: So you felt as you were reading it that you resented the fact that she was trying to impose her views on you as a reader?

Anna: Yes, that's right. The children stopped being vegetarians at the end as well.

R: Why was that?

Anna: Because of what the woman had said and I thought it was very annoying. The parents also criticized vegetarians a lot. They weren't vegetarians themselves; it was only the two children who were. Another thing they did throughout the book was they criticized animal rights activists to a massive extent. They claimed that animal rights activists didn't know about animals, they didn't know about the natural cycle, they didn't know about anything. And you can *see* the sarcasm in the title, *Who Ever Heard of a Vegetarian Fox?* (ibid., 1990)

You can *see* the sarcasm in that. It's really saying, "Why aren't you eating meat?" You know what I mean ... when all the other animals do and there's not a vegetarian fox because the fox kills other animals.

R: And you think the two children weren't given a voice in the book?

Anna: They were given a voice but their voices were strained. I think the book was really criticizing animal rights activists and also anyone who believed in animal rights.

As Stephens (1992) reminds us, writing for children is generally 'purposeful' and in her critique of this particular novel, Anna voices strong objections to the monological structuring of the text, with its obtrusive ideology. Hollindale (1988) explores the ways in which ideology is inscribed in children's fiction, arguing that ideology:

is an inevitable, untameable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transactions between books and children (p.10).

He identifies three levels of ideology present in a children's book. The first comprises:

the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story (p.10).

The second is less didactic, more covert and he defines it as *passive* ideology. The third level operates through the medium of language, which I have argued is ideological and so to a considerable extent, we are all enmeshed in a web of complex ideological orientations:

those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it (Bakhtin, 1986, p.122).

In the book which I am discussing, ideology inheres at the explicit, surface level of the text. In exploring the relationship between narrative and ideology, I have drawn on the work of the semiologist, Umberto Eco. In *The Role of the Reader* (1979), he argues that all texts carry ideological assumptions and in their response readers have three options: their response can be consensual in that they accept the ideology inscribed in the text, they can import their own ideological assumptions, making an ‘aberrant’ reading or they can adopt a critical stance, challenging the underlying textual ideology. It is the third option which Anna has adopted in her resistance to the ideological assumptions inscribed within the text. In her critique, Anna speculates on the ideological orientation of the writer and here I think we can distinguish between the ‘real’ author and the implied author:

the partially depicted, designated author who enters a work
(Bakhtin, 1986, p.109).

The relationship between the real author and the implied author is complex and the two need not be identical (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). The counterpart of the ‘implied author’ is the ‘implied reader’, a hypothetical reader:

situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning
toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him
(Iser, 1978, p.38).

We must distinguish between the implied reader and the *actual* reader who in this case is Anna.

In developing my argument, I have drawn on the work of Bakhtin (1981) and Iser (1978) and the approaches of both to the relationship between text and reader are similar. However, there is the implication in Iser’s exposition that the most successful reading is one in which the actual reader and the implied reader are in alignment, a perspective which privileges a single unified reading position and which Booth (1983) has taken to an extreme, when he argues that ideal readings are produced through strategies of identification. A Bakhtinian perspective implies that the multi-vocal nature of narrative opens up opportunities for readers to question the ideological assumptions of the text, to

offer resistant readings which are just as valid as consensual responses. In her response, Anna is critical of the asymmetrical power relationship between the wealthy landowner and her young interlocuters:

She told them that they were completely wrong and she cut them down to size really.

The ideology of the text is presented through the dominant perspective of this character which is discussed explicitly in the text, a device which is typical of the monologic novel (Bakhtin, 1986).

We are reminded by Stephens (1992) that:

point of view is the aspect of narration in which implicit authorial control of audience reading strategies is probably most powerful (p.26).

Anna recognizes its power to impose a subject position in her comment:

Any child who had read that, younger than me, might not realize that it was only one person's point of view.

The acquiescence of the young narratees in the story, the child interlocuters, shows that the wealthy landowner had successfully imposed her views on them and exerts a powerful influence on actual readers to do likewise. The ideological manoeuvring of the implied author is demonstrated in the 'strained' voices of the child interlocuters, the much louder voices of the wealthy landowner and the children's parents and the 'hidden polemic' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 197) in the title. As Anna comments indignantly:

And you can see the sarcasm in the title *Who Ever Heard of a Vegetarian Fox?* You can see the sarcasm in that.

The argument I am putting forward is that an *interrogative* reading:

the production of text against text (Scholes, 1985, p.24),

is emancipatory, empowering the reader to resist the ideology inscribed in the text.

A DISTANT SHORE

History is the ultimate signifier of literature as it is the ultimate signified (Eagleton, 1976, p.72).

In the following conversation, which took place on April 22nd, 2001 when Anna was thirteen years old, our discussion centred on historical fiction. Anna enjoyed books which ‘opened up new worlds’ and she had read a wide range of novels set in Victorian times. These included, *The Great Elephant Chase* (Cross, 1992), *Street Child* (Doherty, 1995) *The Hiring Fair* (O’Hara, 1993), *Amelia* (Parkinson, 1993), *The Flither Pickers* (Tomlinson, 1992) and *The Guns of Easter* (Whelan, 1996). We began by talking in general terms about historical fiction, then discussed briefly *Street Child* by Berlie Doherty, before going on to explore in some detail *The Flither Pickers* by Teresa Tomlinson. I began by asking Anna why she enjoyed historical fiction:

Anna: I’ve always liked to read stories set in past times. I love the idea of being transported into a different world and feeling as if I were living in a different time. *Amelia* was brilliant. It was set in Ireland in 1914. It had quite a lot in it about women’s rights. Another book I really enjoyed was *The Hiring Fair*. It was a wonderful book. It was set in Ireland in Victorian times. At the start I felt that *Sally*, the main character, was I felt really, really like *Sally*. She was called *Scatterbrain Sally* because she would read and forget about everything else. I’m very, very interested in the past and there are so many ... when you think about it, these people were really just like us. They obviously had their own personalities and so on but I think they were just different in that they had a different way of life, a much more difficult way of life in some cases. If you read a history textbook, you don’t actually find out as much about the kind of *experiences* people had and what they thought. I think you actually learn

much more about the past from a historical novel than you would from a textbook.

R: In what way do you think?

Anna: Well, because you're finding out about what people did and people are the most important thing; in a textbook you're not told about the actual lives they led, their day to day lives.

R: Another book you mentioned reading was *Street Child*. It is set in Victorian London, isn't it?

Anna: Yes, I seem to have read loads of books like this. I feel I know a lot about Victorian Times and Victorian London. Berlie Doherty is actually one of my favourite writers and I thought *Street Child* was really, really good. All the way through the book I thought it was just fictional but actually some of the elements in it are true and I thought that made it more exciting. It was actually *Jim Jarvis*, who is the 'Street Child' of the title who led Dr Barnardo to found his first refuge for children in London.

R: What kind of picture does the writer paint of Victorian London?

Anna: People are ... there's a lot of poverty and people dying, sometimes in the street, and a lot of children living on the streets and nobody there to help them. There is the workhouse but they all try to steer clear of it because it's just like a prison. They might as well be sent to prison as the workhouse; at one point in the book, one person said he'd prefer to be sent to prison because even that would be better than the workhouse. In the workhouse everybody is segregated ... families are all separated. Men, women and children are separated and people are treated like animals. It

would actually be better to be in prison; the workhouse is like a prison where poverty can be hidden away so that they can turn a blind eye to it and a lot of them do. The rich people turn a blind eye to it as if it's nothing to do with them even the other poverty stricken people who have jobs, they feel powerless to help them so they have nobody really. They are just tucked away in the workhouse.

R: Why do you think richer people take that attitude?

Anna: I think they just tried to blank it out of their minds and turn a blind eye to it and not really *see* it. Even though they knew it was there, they didn't want to *look* at it, so they looked the other way.

R: Do you think the writer gives you an insight into what it would have been like to be in that situation?

Anna: I think so. In a children's book ... well for a lot of these children there was no happy ending, you know what I mean, so it is difficult for writers because children like to have stories with a happy ending, you know. This particular story does have a *hopeful* ending, but for a lot of these children their real life stories had a very sad ending; they died of starvation or disease and it's difficult to write a story about that.

R: Do you think it's essential for a story like this to have a reasonably happy ending?

Anna: I suppose no one wants to read a really depressing book; there would be no point. I think you can have a book that doesn't depress you but still gets the idea across to the reader of what it might have been like. In this book it does show that people die, but it still has a happy ending in one sense although there are still a lot of questions left

unanswered. It doesn't say that everyone lived happily ever after. It doesn't say that but you sort of think that *Jim Jarvis*, the main character, did okay.

R: It's a reasonably hopeful ending then?

Anna: Yes, in some ways it is. Dr Barnardo set up his famous refuge to provide a home for street children like *Jim*, but obviously, looking at it from now, from where we are now, you know that even that doesn't have a completely happy ending because we know that these homes weren't always happy places for the children who lived in them. From that point of view, it's not so good but from another point of view he did help a lot of people.

Eagleton (1976) reminds us that fiction negotiates:

a particular ideological experience of real history (p.77)

and it is in Anna's analysis of the ways in which the writer has imaginatively transformed historical reality that the importance of reading as a social and political activity manifests itself. Anna's reflections on the dialogical interplay between real and imagined experience and her consideration of the difficulties facing the writer in negotiating:

an imaginary production of the real (Eagleton, 1976, p.75)

show, in my view, the value of narrative in facilitating the exploration and evaluation of human experience as a structure of possibilities. It is in the context of the interplay between cultural determinism and autonomy that we explored another historical novel, *The Flither Pickers*, by Teresa Tomlinson (1992). Since this narrative formed the main focus of our discussion, I will begin by introducing it.

The Flither Pickers (Tomlinson, 1992) is set in a close knit fishing village on the NE coast of England, in the late 19th century and depicts the harsh lives of the women of North Yorkshire, who gathered ‘flithers’ to bait the lines for the fishing fleets. The narrator, *Lisa Welford*, is a thirteen year old girl who lives in a cottage in the village of Sandwyck Bay, with her parents, grandparents, older sister *Irene* and younger brother *Billy*. Her older brother *Frank* has joined the British army and gone to fight in the Boer War. There is a strong sense of community in the village and despite their grinding poverty, the women of the village do their best to support each other, facing up to the precariousness of their existence with energy and courage. The climax of the novel in which the women launch the lifeboat to save the fishing crews who are caught in a storm, is based on an actual event which took place in Runswick Bay in 1901. According to the writer, the idea for the novel came from the photographs of Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, the Victorian Whitby photographer who recorded the day to day lives of the fishing community and whose photos accompany the text (Shaw, 1978). Anna had just finished reading the novel and I asked her what she thought about it:

Anna: I thought *The Flither Pickers* was brilliant. I’ve been reading a lot of books about the sea recently. I read *Daughter of the Sea* (Doherty, 1999) as well and I sort of like the idea of the sea. What I really like about the book ... I’m very interested in the past and stuff and it’s a kind of historical novel but it gives you a lot more *information* than you’d expect. The story was written around these old photographs and I thought that was really, really good. It gives you an insight into what happened at the time. I know a lot about what life was like in Victorian times in towns and so forth but I hadn’t read much about life in a fishing village and it was really interesting and different and good.

R: It’s an unusual title isn’t it?

Anna: I think actually it's a very good title. It suggests that it's going to be a different story ... you know it's sort of quaint. The name makes it *sound* interesting. I like the way it opens because it makes you feel as if you're actually standing on the cliff top beside *Lisa*, gazing down at the bay.

R: The story unfolds from *Lisa's* point of view, doesn't it? What did you think of the character of *Lisa*?

Anna: I liked *Lisa*. I thought she was really courageous. She's very lively but at the same time thoughtful.

R: Do you think *Lisa* changes in the course of the story?

Anna: Yes, I think she did change because she grew up. She became more empowered. I think she began to realise she was more in control of her life and it was up to her to take control. At the beginning of the book she said something about learning not being for her. I think she felt that because she came from a fishing community, learning was for other, richer people but then she realised that it was for everyone and she could make choices and she wasn't going to be controlled by what other people thought of her.

R: There's a very strong sense of community in the village, isn't there?

Anna: Yeah, they have a really strong community spirit. There's a feeling that everyone has to pull together for everyone else. They all know each other. For example, can you remember the bit about the woman who lost her husband at sea? She had a large family and she took in washing to make a living. Everyone helped her out by giving her fish and so on and sometimes they had so little themselves they could only give her fish heads. They all think of themselves as being on a level footing with everyone else. They know

that they're all dependent on the sea and they want to support each other; it's just the right thing to do. They know in times of trouble there's always someone they can lean on. It's as if the village has a safety net; there's always someone to fall back on.

R: Most of the main characters were women. What did you think of the way women were represented in the story?

Anna: It showed they had a hard life even though the men were the ones who went out in the boats. The women had a very hard life; it wasn't easy picking the flithers all day long; you really had to work very hard at it. I think that *Lisa*, even though she had grown up with it, didn't realize just how difficult it was until she actually had to do it herself. I think the women showed great courage; it was a constant struggle with the sea.

R: There were several strands in the story, weren't there? One was 'the picture man', as they called him, who took a photo of *Lisa* and her friend and it won a competition.

Anna: I thought the idea of the photographer was a really good one. It added a lot to the story and it made for a happier ending.

R: How was it linked to the ending?

Anna: The ending isn't *completely* happy because the sea ... obviously life continues in the story. You knew their lives were going to continue much the same but it's a *satisfactory* ending in that it gives you the idea that there is some hope for a better life for *Lisa*. She didn't have to be a flither picker like her mum. In fact, her mum didn't want her to be a flither picker. She was good at school and she could make something of her life and the photographer helps her to

realize that because he takes her to the house where the writer used to live and it's a cottage just like the one *Lisa* lives in and she starts to think she doesn't have to be a flither picker. She doesn't have to be dependent on the sea. She began to have an inkling that she might even be a writer herself.

R: The photographer gave her two books, didn't he? What difference did that make to her, do you think?

Anna: I think the books inspired *Lisa* because the writer came from her own village and she grew up in a house just like *Lisa*'s. Also, her books were about a fishing community just like the one *Lisa* came from. In a way the photographer and the book brought the family together. It helped bring *Lisa* closer to her mum and it showed *Lisa* that everyone can make something of their lives, also that their way of life was worth recording. I thought the idea of the photographs was brilliant because it made the book more realistic and more personal especially since the girls in the book look about the same age as me.

Stephens (1992) designates the genre of historical fiction as one of the areas of writing for young people which can be 'radically ideological' and it is the ideological assumptions underlying the way in which the past is reconstructed in *The Flither Pickers*, which will be the main focus in my analysis of Anna's transcript. When discussing historical fiction, we need to distinguish between that which is now historical but was written contemporaneously and that which is set in the past but has been written by contemporary writers. The classification of a historical novel is complicated but for the purposes of my analysis I am defining it as a story which reconstructs, with the aid of research, the events and culture of the past. In my analysis, I will focus on three aspects of the narrative suggested by Anna's response: ideologies of identity, in particular the representation of women; the creation of emotional engagement with the past, and the motif of the emancipatory power of the literary imagination. As I have argued, ideology is inherent in the fictional text and a

key factor in its operation is the way in which the discourse of the real and the discourse of the imaginary are interwoven in the transformation of 'reality'. In her introduction to the novel, Tomlinson tells us that in writing *The Flither Pickers*, she drew on her own childhood experiences as well as specific historical events. The idea for the novel was inspired by actual photographs taken in Whitby Bay by the photographer Frank Meadow Sutcliff, and a selection of these illustrates the text. The photographs, which Anna describes as 'a brilliant idea' capture fleeting moments, expressions and events in the lives of ordinary people, offering a powerful link to the past, a spectral presence signifying absence, evoking a haunting sense of the passing of time, which is itself a central concept in historical fiction. The interaction between actual and imagined events, the detailed depiction of women at work and the naturalistic descriptions all intensify the sense of historical authenticity, masking ontological differences between lived and imaginary experience. In her opening comments, Anna's interpretation of the narrative is essentially humanist. It shows individual subjects, she argues:

to be just like us, different only in that they have a different way of life.

Tomlinson is writing within a humanist perspective but I would define it as *progressive* humanist in that her characters are ordinary individuals in domestic situations, the kind of people as Anna points out, whose lives are not normally the stuff of fiction. I have argued that all narrative representations of subjectivity have a social and ideological base (Bakhtin, 1981; Hayden White, 1981). The model of subjectivity embedded in this text is dialogical, a relationship of reciprocity which conflates the dualisms of self / other, and individual / society, placing a high value on intersubjective, co-operative relationships.

Representation of Women

The main characters in *The Flither Pickers* are women and the novel foregrounds their role, validating the experience of their day to day working lives. Much of their time is spent working on the seashore, a liminal space bridging the inner reality of domesticity and the outer reality of the wider

world, obliterating the opposition between them and subverting the dualisms which are implicated in patriarchal thought systems (Moi, 1985). The work is physically hard and demanding and the women are portrayed as feisty and resilient, showing courage and stamina in the face of adversity, drawing strength from their sense of pride in their culture and traditions. In her response, Anna comments on the growth out of solipsism of the protagonist, *Lisa*, whose developing sense of selfhood, forged through intersubjective relationships, affirms the value of interpersonal relations for maturation (Bakhtin, 1981). This has important implications for reader response; since the construction of intersubjective relations within the text are analogous to the ways in which relationships between self and other are constructed in society, reading can be interpreted as a re-enactment of the process through which individuals construct their social selfhood. Anna empathizes with *Lisa*, commenting on how she has changed in the course of the book, becoming aware that she has choices, realizing that she doesn't have to become a flither picker.

A World Enacted

An important element in Anna's discussion is her view that historical fiction opens experiential access to understanding the relationship between individuals, time and society; in her opinion, readers learn much more about the past from fiction than from textbooks, gaining an insight into the day to day lives of people who are, as Anna asserts, 'the most important thing'; for Anna the book *dramatizes* the quotidien lives of individuals, presenting a 'world enacted' (Iser, 1989, p.251), which the reader internalizes, in Vygotskian terms, as inner monologue (Vygotsky, 1978), a powerful tool for reflective learning. As Bruner (1986) argues, narrative is a specific way of knowing, and fiction serves to make the past more comprehensible, enhancing that reflexive sense of being-in-time and awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of time (Ricoeur, 1981).

The Literate Imagination

The third strand which Anna discussed in her response is the way in which this particular book privileges the emancipatory power of education, in particular

the development of the literate imagination. As the story unfolds, we learn that *Lisa* is good at school, although she is often absent and her teacher, a friend of the 'picture man' who took *Lisa's* photograph, has tried to encourage her to stay on at school and become a pupil teacher. *Lisa's* mother, too, values education and sees it as a way for *Lisa* to escape the grinding poverty of their lives. Through the photographer, *Lisa* is introduced to the books of Mary Linskill (1840 - 1891), the Victorian Whitby writer, whose real life background was similar to *Lisa's* fictitious one. Linskill was a native of Whitby, who, like many other writers including Robert Westall, Robin Jarvis and Bram Stoker, took the North Yorkshire coastal area as the setting for her romantic fiction. *Lisa* is enthralled with the books, seeing in the narrativization of her way of life, affirmation of her own culture and identity:

Fisher maidens, I thought. Why, who'd put them in a book? I looked down the page and began to read. Why, I thought, it's about girls like us ... like me, or Irene or Mary Jane (p.48).

Lisa enjoys the book so much that she tells the story to her friend *Mary Jane* and then sits up late each night, reading it to *Irene* and her mother. She describes how, as they were getting near the end of the story, they all felt really flat and thought they'd have to start at the beginning again. As Anna points out in her commentary, *Lisa* is inspired by the fictional reconstruction of her own way of life and tentatively considers becoming a writer herself.

The mise-en-abyme effect within the book enhances our metacognitive and metafictional awareness and opens up a space for imaginative reflection on the nature of the reading process and the ways in which the dialogic interaction between reader and text helps to make new sense of human experience.

A Different Story

I gather words to make a great straw – yellow fire, but if you don't put in your own flame, my fire won't take, my words won't burst into pale yellow sparks. My words will remain dead words (Cixous, cited in Wilkie-Stibbs 2002, p.177).

The following discussion took place on January 5th, 2001, a few days after Anna had celebrated her fourteenth birthday. As usual, I began by asking Anna about the books she had been reading since our previous conversation and she told me that she had read a number of books set in other countries or other times including *Coram Boy* (Gavin, 2000), and *The Other Side of Truth* (Naidoo, 2000). In addition she had read *Kit's Wilderness* (1991) and *Heaven Eyes* (2000), both by David Almond. The book she chose to talk about was *Heaven Eyes* which I will begin by introducing.

Heaven Eyes

Heaven Eyes (Almond, 2000) is a contemporary novel set in Yorkshire in the post - industrial age, a liminal landscape poised between urban decay and regeneration. As in *Kit's Wilderness*, children play along the river bank among the rubble left by the demolition of once thriving factories and warehouses; it is a bleak landscape but there are chinks of light in the signs of urban renewal across the river from Whitegates children's home. *Grampa*, a senile old man has made a home of sorts for himself and a little girl whom he calls *Heaven Eyes*, in the derelict ruins of an old printing works on the banks of the river where he had been employed as a caretaker for many years. As the story unfolds, we learn that *Heaven Eyes* was the only survivor when the boat in which she was sailing with her family along the river, capsized and she was rescued from the Black Middens by *Grampa*. He feeds her on cornbeef, chocolates and dried fruit stacked in packing cases at the abandoned works and calls her *Heaven Eyes* telling her that she was once a 'fishy thing swimming in the water' (p. 89), that her memories of the past are but dreams and that the human beings she sometimes sees cycling on the opposite bank of the river, which has benefited from urban regeneration, are ghosts from another world, a reminder that one day the future will be our past. The first humans *Heaven Eyes* meets are three children, *Erin*, *January* and *Mouse* who have run away from Whitegates Children's Home. The story is narrated by *Erin*, whose mother had died a few years earlier and who is trying to come to terms with the intensity of her grief. *January* is so called because he was abandoned on a bitter winter's night on the steps of a hospital and *Mouse* has been tattooed by his father with the words 'Please look after me', in a parody of *A Bear Called*

Paddington (Bond,1971[1958]), which his father had once read to him. Whitegates is run by a woman called *Maureen* who draws on strategies such as visualizations, circle time and Life Story Books to help the children overcome their feelings of loss and abandonment. Some of them treat it as a game, filling their books with 'possible stories and possible lives' (p. 89). Others, like *Erin*, regard these practices as a form of social control, part of the 'ideological state apparatus' (Althusser, 1971), and resist the ways in which they are positioned by *Maureen* as children who are 'damaged beyond repair' (p.7). The children frequently run away from Whitegates, sometimes for a couple of hours, occasionally for a few days and it is on one of those adventures that *Erin*, *January* and *Mouse* make their way across the rubble strewn, cinder blackened wasteland to launch a homemade raft and sail down the River Tyne towards the open sea, searching for freedom and autonomy. Their expedition comes to a shuddering halt when the raft becomes trapped in the treacherous mudflats of the river beside the gothic ruins of the decaying printworks where *Grampa* holds sway. They are rescued by *Heaven Eyes*, who greets them, in strange sounding rhythmic language, as her long lost brothers and sister and succeeds in persuading *Grampa*, a tall menacing figure wielding a shovel, not to dig the children back into the black, oily mud. Every night *Grampa* trawls the mudflats for 'treasure', digging from the black mud broken delft, sodden clothes, bleached bones and old coins. His goal is to find a saint whom he is convinced is buried there. He adopts *Mouse* as his helper, recording his findings afterwards in a large black ledger which is his substitute for memory. In his increasingly befuddled state, he does not recognize *January* when he comes up on him alone, taking him for a 'ghost' from the outside world and threatens him with an axe, desisting only when *Heaven Eyes* reminds him that these are her friends. Gradually *Heaven Eyes* reveals to *Erin* her 'sleep thoughts' (p.128), fragments of memory from a distant past in which she was called *Anna*, a dream vision of her family, a man standing in the shadows of the printing press, a woman:

with hair that is like the sun and eyes that is like the running
water (p.128)

and other:

little figures like the ghosts across the runny water (p.129).

These things must be kept secret, she tells *Erin*, because they make *Grampa* so angry. *Erin* has her own secrets, a cardboard box of 'treasures' in which she keeps mementoes of her mother, 'transitional objects' which for *Erin* unlock memories of her mother so vivid that she can conjure up her presence. These mementoes, poignant in their ephemerality, - Sweet Honey lipstick, Black Tulip nail varnish, her final bottle of perfume are invested with intense symbolic value. It is the memory of her mother, together with the collective strength of the other children, which sustains her and at one point, finding herself alone and thinking that *January* has abandoned her, she wanders through the labyrinthine alleys and broken buildings of the printworks, down into the darkest recesses of the cellars and her own inner terrors, mindscape and landscape dissolving. The voice of *Heaven Eyes*, who comes to search for her and the reappearance of *January* help her to overcome the sense of alienation she has experienced and her identification with the pain of loss suffered by *Heaven Eyes*, helps her to come to terms with her own loneliness in reaching out to the other. In the meantime, *January* finds the dossier on *Heaven Eyes* which *Grampa* has hidden away and which contains newspaper cuttings which tell how her family had been lost at sea ten years previously. Events move to a climax. *Grampa* admits that he had tried to obliterate the past from *Heaven Eyes*'s memory but claims that he did it for her:

to keep you happy forever in your heart (p.159).

Meanwhile, *Mouse* finds the petrified body of a print worker in the Black Middens and the children carry him into the print works, laying him out amid lighted candles in the crumbling grandeur of the hall, beneath the wings of a stone angel. He is greeted by *Grampa* as the saint for whom he has been searching. The old man now recognizes the inevitable, that *Heaven Eyes* must return to the world of 'ghosts' and that afternoon, just before the cranes move in to demolish the print works, he dies, while writing in his ledger the story of *Heaven Eyes*, interwoven with the stories of *Erin*, *January* and *Mouse*.

In developing a framework for my analysis of Anna's response, I will draw on the contribution of feminist approaches to children's literature such as the work

of Wilkie-Stibbs (2002), arguing that *Heaven Eyes* can be considered as a paradigmatic text of the feminine and that Anna's response may be analysed within that framework, drawing on Kristevan (1986) readings of Lacan and on the theories of Chodorow (1989). The features which are symptomatic of the feminine in children's literature have been identified by Wilkie-Stibbs (2002) and they include a central focalizing character who is displaced into a surreal space which becomes transformative, constant blurring of the boundary between fantasy and reality, a narrative pattern of the circular journey, separation, integration and return and an emphasis on storytelling as a motif. These are all recurrent features of *Heaven Eyes* and form the focus of Anna's response.

I began by asking her what she had thought of the book:

Anna: I thought it was very good; it was quite unusual. It wasn't really like any other book I had read before except *Kit's Wilderness* which is by the same writer. There are two different worlds in it; it's a mix of fantasy and reality but you're never quite sure what is real.

R: So there are magical elements in it.

Anna: Yes, the two worlds are separate but then they blend into each other. The children decide to run away and January makes a raft and they sail down the river and as they're sailing along it describes all the different things they saw. They then got stuck in the Black Middens, thick black mudflats on the River Tyne.

R: Did you like the descriptions of the river and so forth? What did you think of them?

Anna: I thought they were very good because if you think about it, if you were on a raft in these circumstances, you wouldn't be gazing into the distance, you would be looking

at the river so if you're looking through the eyes of one of the characters, you need to see what they would have seen.

R: So the way the writer describes it, you're looking at the river as the children might have seen it?

Anna: Yeah, it's as if you're one of the characters looking out of the raft at the water churning around you.

R: So what happens when they reach the Black Middens?

Anna: They get stuck in the black mud and then they hear *Grampa* and *Heaven Eyes* and that's the first time they meet *Heaven Eyes*. She speaks quite strangely and tries to get them out of the water because they're in a dangerous situation and they could actually drown and she eventually succeeds in getting them out. This is when the magical part of the story really starts.

R: How does the writer create a magical atmosphere?

Anna: The name 'The Black Middens' is sort of ... it sounds very mysterious and the way it's written it's almost as if you're with them whenever they're sinking down into the mud; it's as if you're with them and then on the bank they hear these voices and they're so different from what you would normally expect, it sounds as if they're voices from long ago or as if you have landed on a far away shore. *Heaven Eyes* and *Grampa* speak in a totally different way. *Heaven Eyes* doesn't seem to grasp the concept of society or anything like that because those are actually the first humans she'd seen at close quarters since she was taken out of the 'Black Middens' as a baby. She thinks that normal people are ghosts. *Grampa* has tried to shield her from ordinary life but he is losing his memory and he seems to be a little bit senile. The whole scene is quite desolate in a way.

R: You spoke before about reading a book being like a journey; the idea of the journey is a very common one in children's literature, isn't it?

Anna: There are lots of books with journeys in them like for example, *The Great Elephant Chase* (Cross, 1992). I think there are two different types of journeys. There's the literal journey like for example, a journey down the river like in *Heaven Eyes* and I think that helps the writer to structure the other sort of journey which is really a journey of the mind where the character undergoes a change in herself and maybe in her relationship with other people as well.

R: A psychological journey?

Anna: Yes, I think in this story it's actually both. It's about a journey for *Erin*, *Mouse* and *January* to find a place for themselves because they are all ... they don't want to be people who are trapped in the past; they want to live in the present as well and they're trying to look at their future and find a place for themselves and gain freedom and that sort of thing.

R: You think it's a way for them to think about their future as well as the past?

Anna: Yes, I think that they've all been told in Whitegates that they'll always be at a disadvantage because of the way they've been damaged and most of the emphasis while they're at Whitegates is on the fact that they're damaged that they have so many problems and I think they're trying to find a future for themselves that's not shaped by the past.

R: What about the idea of the river, the journey being on a river? Do you think that had any particular significance?

Anna: Well, the river gave them direction I think, as there was the river and they were sailing along it and everything was so different. It was like a border dividing past and future in a way, and they sailed into the past, into the 'Black Middens'. It was almost as if it was something they had to do and they were being guided by destiny; if they had gone into a forest for example, they could have gone in any direction and so it would not have been fate that brought them there, just chance.

R: So, it was almost as if fate led them in that particular direction?

Anna: Yes because if they hadn't been ... whenever they were going along the river, there was a definite pathway and then they sailed along the river until they got stuck in the 'Black Middens', so once they had started their journey on a river there was one direction that they had to take; it was as if they were destined to meet *Grampa* and *Heaven Eyes*.

R: So you think fate actually played a big part in the story?

Anna: Not just fate but destiny ... whenever you think of it you think of *Erin*, *January* and *Mouse* entering into this new world but then you can change it around and think of it as *Heaven Eyes* seeing them come out of the 'Black Middens'; you know it must be for her because it gave her someone to lead her into what was for her a new world and then they all became like a family. It was as if fate or destiny had played a part in bringing them all together. Then when the children take the body out of the 'Black Middens' and *Grampa* tells them that it's a saint, the night after *Grampa* dies, *Erin* and *January* see the shadow of the saint leading the shadow of *Grampa* out onto the water and it's almost as if he's being brought to a new world. It's as if he's being guided, just as

Grampa has guided *Heaven Eyes*; it's as if the saint is guiding him into the new world just as he brought *Heaven Eyes* into a new world.

One of the characteristic features of feminine writing (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2002) is the blurring of boundaries between real and fantasy worlds. In her response Anna comments on how the writer effects the transition between them through the device of a journey along the river. Bakhtin's description of the chronotope of the road could also, I would suggest, be applied to the river:

Time fuses together with space and flows in it (1981, p.244).

The river is associated with the underworld in Greek mythology and it is also the element that connects with prelapsarian time, the time of the Imaginary. The river is a liminal space, in Anna's words:

a border dividing past and future.

It was as if the children had:

sailed into the past,

their imaginary entry into the past symbolizing the search for the childhoods they had lost. Anna also comments on how the writer creates a sense of verisimilitude in the way the river is perceptually focalized through the eyes of the children on the raft, letting us visualize the churning black water and the misty, cimmerian landscape through their eyes as dusk becomes night. It is a literal journey but also a journey into the psyche, a return to the Imaginary in an atemporal space, where the interplay of imagination, identity and memory, facilitates the:

reconstruction of the felt past in the present (Chodorow, 1989, p.4)

in the on-going narrativization of selfhood. As Anna points out, the three children:

don't want to be people who are trapped in the past; they want to live in the present as well and find a place for themselves in the future.

An important theme in both *Kit's Wilderness* and *Heaven Eyes*, is the power of narrative as an imaginative resource. I began by asking Anna what she thought of the part played by stories in the books. I quote from the transcript at some length so as not to interrupt the flow of conversation.

Anna: Stories are very important in both books. I suppose it's because stories are connected to life and how you live your life. They're not just for entertainment. They all have references to life and the different things you have to deal with in life and it's almost as if for each person who reads a book, the characters give them *different* lives. I think stories are all about belonging to places and belonging to people. That's why the children cling onto their stories and tell them over and over again. Their memories are tied in with their stories. With some of the children whenever they reflect on their memories it's like a dream because the people who are in their memories of the past are no longer there; it's as if their memories are dreams because there's no way of getting back to the people or places they remember. *Erin* has her mother's photograph and her perfume and nail varnish and they help her to remember who she is, to build up her own story of herself. Her story is really important to her but not just her story, she thinks all the other children's stories are important too. Their stories are part of her story.

R: Yes, she says that their stories are all interwoven, doesn't she? Does *Erin's* story change, do you think, in the course of the book?

Anna: Yes, I think it's a hopeful story in that *Erin* doesn't lose confidence in herself. She's very kind and she really

cares about the other children. She's not afraid to stand up for them. She's also quite honest and upfront with *Maureen* because she's annoyed with *Maureen* for trying to take away the children's optimism. I think that after the journey *Erin* realized that she would have to create a new life for herself, and it gave her the strength to do this. She knew that she had responsibilities and that other people depended on her and now she had *Heaven Eyes* to take care of. It's almost as if she feels that it's her role to give the children confidence when no one else was there to give them that. She wants to be there for them. For example, she's very, very supportive of *Winston*, the boy who makes the models. She tells him that he can do anything he wants to do because she realizes that he is making a journey too, a journey into his imagination.

R: The world of *Grampa* and *Heaven Eyes* is a very strange, mysterious world, isn't it? It's almost like a journey into the imagination.

Anna: It is a strange world really. *Grampa* wanted to create a life separate from anyone else, just himself and *Heaven Eyes*. He has brought *Heaven Eyes* up to believe that the people she sometimes sees on the far bank are ghosts. It's almost as if time has stopped in their world. When the children arrive they don't say, "On Monday, such and such, on Tuesday, such and such". Time was sort of ... it's very difficult to gauge because so much seems to happen when they're there and so much is strange because it's like another world. It's as if there's another time dimension for it as well because whenever they're in *Whitegates*, things were so very familiar. They did things at the same time every day and so whenever they came to this new place, it was as if time stood still. Their sense of time changed.

R: *Heaven Eyes* doesn't seem to understand the concept of time at all, does she? When *Erin* asks her how old she is, she just doesn't understand.

Anna: Her concept of time is night and day. She calls it sleeps and days and it's impossible for her to count how many sleeps she's had. She just remembers each day for each day. She doesn't go to school, she doesn't have any concept of months or years or even weeks and days really. She seems to live one day at a time. It's as if everything is the same because she just wakes up every day and the same kind of things happen; every night *Grampa* goes digging for treasure and searching for ghosts and takes *Heaven Eyes* with him.

R: Did you find it an interesting story?

Anna: Yes I thought it was quite exciting in parts because for example, whenever they were on the raft they were going very, very fast and passing all these different places and I thought the descriptions were very good and the tension built up. Whenever they got stuck in the Black Middens, that was quite exciting and the climax of the story, whenever *Grampa* is trying to fight the changes that have come about and *January* and *Erin* are trying to tell *Heaven Eyes* about her past and *Grampa* doesn't want this and he's trying to fight against it. He has tried to make everything perfect for her by wiping away her past and because of this she didn't have any gauge of time and then when *Erin* and *January* and *Mouse* came along, everything changed.

R: How does she feel when she sees the photographs and so forth and learns what her real name is?

Anna: She is surprised really but she knew they were familiar because she recognizes them from her dreams or 'sleep thoughts'. These are really her memories, so once she

sees the pictures, they reconnect her with the past and it's as if her whole life, instead of being torn into two parts, is joined together again. It's really the past that makes a person what they are but until the children came, *Heaven Eyes* didn't really have a past, so she couldn't be her full person. She could only be an imaginary person and she was always going to have to change. She was always going to have to grow up and *Grampa* had been trying to hold back that time.

R: Do you think this is a worthwhile story for someone of your age to read?

Anna: I think so. It's one of those books that has a lot of ideas in it, about the past, present and future, about stories, about imagination, all those different themes running through it. It's the sort of book you can look into and find some depth.

R: After you're finished reading it, would your thoughts go back to it?

Anna: Yes, I think that a story can't really be good unless your thoughts go back to it because everything changes for the characters in the story, so if you haven't changed *in some way* as a result of reading it, it defeats the purpose really. I think the book shows that other people's stories can help you to learn more about yourself and understand other people's feelings and actions better. Whenever you finish a story, you sum up your thoughts on the story and make your overall judgement on the issues mentioned in the story and I think that's very important.

R: The end is almost like a beginning?

Anna: Yes it is, because you start, you really do start analysing it – thinking about the story and about the issues

mentioned in the story and it's really not ... it might be the ending of all that you have been told but the story is greater than the book, really. The story is in your imagination, a book wouldn't be any good if you had no imagination and the story is really in your head, not in the book and it's your imagination that brings it to life and it's your imagination that can keep it alive. Obviously there's a point when you stop thinking about the story and you move on but you remember the characters and the issues that were brought up, you remember the book for that. If the book doesn't give you the chance to dwell on it, then it's not a very memorable book.

The themes I want to focus on in Anna's response are the crucial role of character in her engagement with the text, the centrality of time in the interplay between imagination, narrative and identity and the role of narrative in the development of self.

Possible Selves

I have argued that narrative is an evaluative context for a view of selfhood. It presents us with a repertoire of possible selves, which we match to our own construction of selfhood. The relationship of possible selves to society is analogous to that of the reader and textual discourse in that both exist in an dialogical relationship to society. This has crucial implications for reader response in relation to the images of selfhood projected by the text.

Kermode tells us that 'novels have characters even if the world has not' (2000, 2nd edn. p.139) and a key feature of Anna's response is her engagement with the psychological aspects of character, the 'living hermeneutics' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.338) of the text. She enjoys discussing the development of character, echoing Bakhtin (1984) in her expression of the view that:

a writer shouldn't interfere with a character and what I mean by that is ... obviously the writer has to interfere with a

character to a certain extent but I think that the writer has to allow the character to be her own person as well.

She also reflects on the way in which character development is speeded up in narrative:

In a book, it's hard to make a person realistically ... in a real way ... go through all these changes. In real life I don't think it would happen so fast. In real life of course, people do learn from their experiences but in a book, it happens much faster.

Anna's reading is marked by reflexivity and metatextual awareness. For her the process of reading is 'a zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102) which illuminates her perception of herself as a learner who interprets and evaluates experience, real and imagined.

One of the features identified as characteristic of the feminine text is that of a central, focalizing character who is transported into a surreal space which becomes transformative; in *Heaven Eyes* this character is *Erin Law*, the narrator. *Erin* is an imaginative, courageous character who resists the hegemonic manipulation of textbook circle time and who, by facing up to her inner turmoil, gains in strength and resilience. The image of selfhood validated by the text is that of the dialogic self. *Erin* recognizes the importance of intersubjectivity, the self as relational as well as differentiated. (Bakhtin, 1981; Chodorow, 1989). She is sustained by her friendships with the other children, confiding in the reader that:

Some of us have broken hearts and troubled souls. But most of us love each other and look out for each other (p.5)

Kermode (2000, 2nd edn.) suggests that the 'as if' of the novel is the 'negation of determinism' (p.135) and in her response, Anna comments on *Erin's* courage and determination, her individuality of thought and emotion, all qualities validated by the culture. She also highlights *Erin's* nurturing qualities, her sensitivity towards the other children, her concern for *Heaven Eyes*, her support for *Winston*. One of the key qualities that readers look for in a

protagonist is a sense of agency and Anna considers that this is crucial especially for younger readers because they need the reassurance of knowing that the protagonist is in control of a particular situation or at least will be able to gain control. As well as evaluating the action, she argues:

the reader is also *becoming* the character and it's much harder for the reader in that position to focus if the character can't really do anything about the situation. I think the reader in that position *resents* becoming the character because it makes her feel powerless.

The empowerment of the protagonist is the empowerment of the reader by proxy, so to speak.

Narrative and Time

I have discussed how Ricoeur (1981) in his analysis of the reciprocal relationship between temporality and narrative, identifies three levels of experience which are common to both, the feeling of being-in-time generated by narrative, the historicity of time and narrative which embeds narrative experience within memory and the sense of deep temporality, in which narrativity transcends the immediacy of time by reaching out into the past and future, extending human consciousness beyond the present. Ricoeur proposes that narrative combines two dimensions of time which provide a transition from the sense of being - in - time to the deeper level of historicity; one dimension moves the plot forward, the other is configurational and deepens our experience of time. For example, in relation to the quest, a metaphorical search for identity, he suggests that:

two qualities of time are thus intertwined; the circularity of imaginary travel and the linearity of the quest as such (Ricoeur, 1981, p.181).

In relation to *Heaven Eyes*, Anna explores these differing time dimensions, commenting on the other worldly, dream like quality of time in the old print works, its mythic, cyclical nature, captured in *Heaven Eyes*'s description as:

Day comes first, then night, then day again, round and round
like dancing (p.80).

Anna contrasts this with the linear time frame of *Whitegates* with its emphasis on the chronicity of the calendar.

Langer (1953) argues that literature creates 'a virtual past' (p.226). In life, the reality of our past is shaped by memory. In fiction, the virtual past is structured by narrative, which is the semblance of memory. For our identity we depend on a sense of continuity; memory makes our lives meaningful just as narrative makes chronicity meaningful. Without a past, Anna argues, *Heaven Eyes* is an 'imaginary' person, only in memory can she go forward. When her memories are retrieved:

her whole life, instead of being broken in two, becomes one.

Story gives us a sense of being - in - time, but it also allows us to observe from outside the vicissitudes of time, a perspective which gives us the sense of 'deep temporality' (Ricoeur, 1981), what is outlined:

in the spaces that extend beyond the words 'the end'
(Calvino, 1993, p.250).

Narrative and Identity

The third theme I want to explore is that of story as an imaginative resource. One of the motifs in *Heaven Eyes* is that of the power of narrative in offering imaginary constructions of selfhood, a repertoire of possible stories, possible selves, narrative as a process of becoming in which:

our stories mix and mingle like the twisting currents of a
river (Almond, 2000, pp.214 –215).

I have identified the use of concentric narrative, the motif of 'story within story' as characteristic of feminine writing; its effect is to destabilize the boundary between actual and symbolic worlds, suggesting that:

if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers, or spectators, can be fictitious too (Genette, 1980, p.236).

This ontological ambiguity is echoed within the text. Anna comments that the story is:

a mix of fantasy and reality but you're never quite sure what is real.

At the beginning of the story, *Erin* assures us:

Some people will tell you that none of these things happened. They'll say they were just a dream that the three of us shared. But they did happen (p.3).

At the end she repeats her assurance that, 'everything is true' (p.216), raising epistemological questions about the nature of truth and reality. In her response, Anna comments on the role of story as a crucible for development:

Everything changes for the characters, so if you haven't changed in some way as a result of reading it, it defeats the purpose really.

Through narrative, we internalize intersubjective relations as possible templates for our own relationships. In Anna's opinion, narrative is an evaluative context for a view of self as well as an interpretive frame through which we can:

understand other people's feelings and actions better.

Anna highlights the dynamic role of the reader, a concept central to my research:

The story is greater than the book, really. The story is in your head, not in the book and it's your imagination that brings it to life and it's your imagination that keeps it alive.

For by sharing the texts we each individually hold within us - a different book for each one, though we have all read the same book - we build another, corporate and multiple text, always more complex, always more interesting, always more than the text we made our own as we read. And we achieve this simply by telling the story of our own reading and listening to the stories others tell of their reading.
(Chambers, 1995, p.132).

In the second strand of my research, I focused on exploring response to voluntary reading by small groups of pupils in discussion with each other. In the methodology chapter, I have described in detail the procedures I followed in establishing the groups, the members of which were all pupils in St Enda's, the school in which I have been teaching for a number of years. During our meetings, I was keen to create an atmosphere of informality, one in which pupils would feel free to engage in discussion about the books they had read, in a context different from that pertaining in the classroom. The books were chosen in a variety of different ways; some they chose themselves either from the library or from a selection I had gathered together. Others were chosen on my recommendation or on the suggestions of friends. All of our discussions were taped. I tried to do this in a fairly unobtrusive way and the pupils, (whose agreement had been sought in advance), soon became accustomed to the procedure and appeared to lose any self-consciousness they may have felt about it initially. After my explanation of the purpose of the research, we spent some time discussing reading histories, preferences and so on. The plan I had in mind was that each group would agree to read a particular book and then a fortnight later, meet to discuss it in depth. Needless to say, it didn't work out quite as neatly as that! All the pupils already had very clear preferences regarding what they wanted to read and if they didn't like a particular book, simply discontinued reading it. The selection of a book which they would all agree to read was actually quite difficult, given that their preferences tended to diverge considerably.

In addition to discussing the books, my Year 8 pupils agreed to keep a journal in which they recorded briefly their thoughts about the narrative. We discussed a range of questions they might consider and their suggestions included the following:

(1) Who or where do you imagine yourself to be in this story?

(2) Which characters would you like to meet?

(3) What are the funniest / saddest parts of the story?

(4) What did you think of the ending to this story?

(5) Would you like to read a follow-on to this story?

I will begin by discussing their written responses to some of these questions in the context of the conceptual framework I have developed. I will then focus on the group of Year 9 pupils who participated in my research, exploring their responses to a range of narrative texts.

The Ghost in the Looking Glass

I imagine myself to be a ghost, looking into a mirror at a world which is the same but different. I can see them but they can't see me. Clare.

One of the questions I have focused on in my research is the nature of the process that creates literary meaning. In developing my thesis, I have drawn on the insights of D.W. Harding (1967, 1977), characterizing the dual role of the reader as spectator and participant. The reader as onlooker shares imaginatively in the world of the story while evaluating that world as it unfolds and exploring its implications in terms of her own subjectivity. Sometimes the onlooker role is highlighted as in the following examples. After reading *A Pack of Lies*, (McCaughrean, 1998), Clodagh writes:

I imagine myself to be watching everything take place through the window of the antique shop.

Laura also focuses on her role as onlooker but afterwards she draws on the narrative as an evaluative frame for her own experience, considering it in the light of the new possibilities opened up by the imaginary world. Here is what she tells us, in response to *The BFG* (Dahl, 1982).

While I'm reading the story, I imagine myself to be behind a video camera watching everything that's going on as if I were making a film. After reading the book I think to myself, what if I were that tall and I think of all the things I could and couldn't do.

Harding (1967, p.12) suggests that:

It could be said that the reader of a novel is in the position of a ghost, watching unseen the behaviour of a group of people in whom he is deeply interested.

An interesting facet of the way in which these young readers describe how they are positioned in the text is the *phantasmic* nature of their experience. They compare their presence in the imaginary world of the narrative to that of shadows, ghosts, invisible presences, not only watching but sharing in the thoughts and feelings of the characters, their very lack of substance making the experience seem more concrete. The desire to know, the interplay of revelation and concealment, would appear to be a potent motivational force in the reading of narrative fiction. Here is how Aoife describes her response to *The Haunting* (Mahy, 1992):

While I was reading this story I felt as if I were a small fly that flew around after *Barney* and the rest of the family. Everything that happened I could see, as if I were flying right above the character that was seeing something or doing something. I also knew about *Barney's* deepest darkest thoughts and I also knew everything that he knew and all the

encounters with the ghosts and all the visions seemed to be in my head as well.

Tiarna writes, in response to the same narrative:

I imagine myself as a shadow, lurking everywhere the characters go, peeping into the script like no-one can see me, but I know what's happening.

Here is Niamh, also writing in response to *The Haunting* (Mahy, 1992):

While I am reading this book, I imagine myself to be a picture hanging on the wall of the room where the action is taking place and watching everything which is happening in the room.

Central to my thesis is the dynamic role of the reader in realizing the potential of the text. Iser (1978) argues that in the process of reading fiction we have the feeling of being in the real world because the accumulation of details and perspectives gives us the illusion of depth and breadth. Carla's description of her experience, in relation to her response to *George's Marvellous Medicine* (Dahl, 2001) captures the active nature of the reader's participation:

I imagine myself to be with *George*, making the medicine and finding exciting and dangerous ingredients to make the grandmother go pop.

Laura's role in response to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997) is equally dynamic. She writes:

During this story, I imagine myself to be right in the middle where everything is happening. Wherever the characters go, I am right there beside them. At the quidditch matches, I'm in the stands and sometimes I'm flying on a broom. During the lessons, I'm sitting there being taught.

Here is Sinead, describing how she imagines herself in the story, *Double Act* (Wilson, 2001):

This story is about the twins writing in their diary and while I'm reading it, I imagine myself to be a pen and I'm looking down on every word in the book.

Maria's description of her experience is an interesting variation on this theme. She writes in response to *Double Act* (Wilson, 2001):

While I'm reading the story, I imagine myself to be the writer and I am actually there with *Ruby* and *Garnet* and I am invisible and writing the story of their lives.

The double state of mind experienced by the reader in her engagement with the imaginary world of the story, oscillating between the roles of spectator and participant is captured by Ashleen in her response to *Bad Girls* (Wilson, 1997):

When I am reading the book I imagine myself to be a ghost or a shadow following the character I am reading about. I also imagine myself to be *Mandy*, doing what she is doing because she is the main character in the book.

Likewise, the dual nature of the reader's role is encapsulated by Laura in her description of how she is positioned in relation to *George's Marvellous Medicine* (Dahl, 2001):

While I am reading this book, I imagine me to be *George*, thinking what he thinks and feeling what he feels and at other times I imagine myself to be watching what is happening.

Shauna's experience is similar to that of Laura. She writes in relation to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997):

While I am reading the story, I imagine myself to be like a shadow, standing there watching everything happening. Sometimes I think of myself as *Hermione*. I like her because she is very smart and would never break any rules unless she had to.

One of the key sources of enjoyment for young readers lies in their emotional engagement with fictional characters. In *Becoming a Reader*, Appleyard (1991) characterizes the young reader aged 8 - 12 in terms of *Reader as Hero and Heroine*. In general the kind of books my Year 8 readers enjoy can loosely be described as adventure stories, a genre particularly popular with this age group (Hall and Coles, 1999). The protagonist, a young heroine or hero, can be visualized as an imaginary construction of possible, desirable selfhood. The narratives frequently feature journeys, quests, tests and almost always culminate in the triumph of good over evil, a strong closure in which equilibrium is restored. Frye (1965) suggests that:

Happy endings do not impress us as true but desirable (p. 170).

There seems little doubt that readers struggle to come to terms with uncertainty and ambivalence in narrative discourse, preferring the reassurance of the recuperative ending but beginning to come to terms with the idea that this may not always be the most appropriate. Here is Eimear, for example, expressing her views on the ending of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950).

I think the ending of the book fits perfectly. I liked the ending because good always defeats evil. If it had ended any other way, I wouldn't have liked it.

Shaneen was likewise very pleased with the ending of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997):

The ending of my book was really brilliant. It suited my book so well and made the whole story even more exciting.

The Suitcase Kid (Wilson, 1993), a novel which deals with the difficulties faced by a young girl in coming to terms with the divorce and remarriage of parents, is a highly popular book with this age group but opinions were divided about the ending. Katrina writes:

I think the ending of this book was alright but it was not the best. I think it was probably a *suitable* ending because it fitted in with the story but it could have ended better. I suppose if I'm honest, I would really have liked it to end differently.

Laura writes of the same book:

I did not like the ending because it was like a dead end and you cannot see beyond the trees and shrubs to see what's next. I would have liked to find out if the parents got back together and to see if Andy got the loving family she really wanted, just her, her mum and her real dad.

Another book which generated a very ambivalent response in relation to its closure was *The Illustrated Mum* (Wilson, 2000). This novel, which won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize (2000), explores the subject of mental illness. The story is focalized by nine year old Dolphin, the narrator, and through her eyes we witness a series of disturbing episodes in the life of her mother, the much tattooed *Marigold*, as her manic depression and alcoholism spiral out of control. Although bleak in parts, the story is told with warmth and humour; it ends on a fragile note of hope with the survival of the relationship between mother and daughter, the admission of Marigold to hospital, her recognition of her illness and acceptance of treatment.

In her commentary, Katie, an avid reader, describes the strong emotional impact of this book and she acknowledges the motivation of the author in tackling this and other difficult subjects. She writes:

In this book, Jacqueline Wilson is trying to tell us that this kind of thing can really happen in everyday life. I understand this but sometimes she can make you so sad that you wish you could get up and do something about it but sometimes it can be funny.

She continues in her journal:

I found this book quite difficult to read because I obviously didn't like the situation *Dolphin* found herself in and it seemed to me there was actually very little she could do about it. In all the other books I've read by Jacqueline Wilson, I knew that the main character would conquer the problems she was faced with but in this book, I just wasn't so sure and I'm still not sure.

She sums up these feelings of uncertainty in her comments on the ending of the book:

I didn't think the ending of the book was very good. It was as if the book just ended in the middle of the story. We don't know what happened to *Dolphin* or *Star's* dads; we don't know how *Dolphin* coped without her dad and we don't know how *Marigold* got on after she came out of hospital.

In developing my analysis, I have drawn on the insights of Harding (1967, 1977), utilizing the metaphor of 'spectator-participant' in conceptualizing the role of the reader. I have suggested that the young readers who participated in my research struggle to come to terms with uncertainty and ambivalence in narrative. A potent source of their pleasure in narrative discourse is the sense of empowerment generated by the visualization of possible selves who are agentic, independent and self-determining, the type of possible selfhood foregrounded in the adventure stories which are so popular with this age group. I have argued in the literature review that, paradoxically, one of the reasons why Blyton, Dahl and Rowling are so popular with children is that they foreground the culturally validated image of the individual as agentic and self-

determining at the expense of the socially acceptable image of the child as compliant, conforming and co-operative. For children who are inscribed in relatively powerless positions in society, adventure narratives open up:

a bright, scintillating preview into the immediate future
(Willinsky and Hunniford, 1993, p.94).

Narratives which offer subtler ideologies of identity, showing agency and determinism as dialogical can initially be disconcerting for young readers as they may embody the kinds of possible selves that they are fearful of becoming, possible selves who must come to terms with particular situations, transcending them emotionally rather than transforming them physically. Such narratives may provide a more lasting blueprint for the imagination for young readers on the verge of adolescence, who are engaged in the ongoing process of constructing and negotiating their identities.

The Book Club

The group of Year 9 students who agreed to participate in my research, dubbed our fortnightly meetings, 'The Book Club'. Of the four participating groups, they were the most committed and (with the exception of one pupil) continued the book club sessions until the end of third year, when they moved on to the next stage of their education. This meant that the research was gradually constructed over time. There were five girls in the group, all friends, and the atmosphere at our meetings was relaxed and informal. As well as attending the book club, they were all members of one of my second year English classes and they would volunteer their opinions on the class novel, as well as the effectiveness or otherwise of different ways of organizing group work based on the novel, a form of respondent validation which I found very useful. My main aim in our meetings was to promote discussion about books, to encourage pupils to reflect critically on their reading experiences and share their developing understandings with others in the group. In refining the techniques I used to encourage discussion, I drew on the 'Tell me' approach developed by Chambers (1993). I will begin by introducing each member of the group, before going on to explore the various ways in which these young readers made sense of texts, drawing on the work of reader response and cultural theory.

Clodagh:

It soon emerged in our discussions that Clodagh was an avid reader. Her twin passions were reading and Irish history and each fuelled interest in the other. "Clodagh's like a history time line," one of the other pupils remarked. "She knows the answers before the teacher does." Some of the other members of the group joked about Clodagh's reading prowess. "Clodagh opens a book one day and finishes it the next", Sheena laughed. "The three of us put together wouldn't read as much as Clodagh," Lisa added. In English class, Clodagh was a very quiet student who almost never volunteered an answer but in our book club discussions, she very often took the lead, talking knowledgeably and confidently about her books. To an extent, Clodagh's subjectivity was defined by her reading; as well as being a source of pleasure, it was also a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973). Her status as a historian was supported by her reading and her reputation as a reader sustained by her knowledge and love of history. She enjoyed reading books about Ireland in conflict and this led to a general interest in narrative fiction about war. During the course of the two years in which she was a member of the book club, she read an extensive range of fiction on the subject of war including Herman Wouk's saga, *The Winds of War* (1971) as well as all three volumes of *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1992 [1911]). She was a courageous reader, tackling difficult and harrowing narratives such as *The Final Journey* (Pausewang, 1996). She enjoyed *Point Horror* and was also a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, sharing those tastes with Lisa and Sinead. Of all the pupils in the discussion groups, Clodagh's reading development was the most dramatic. She became, (to borrow Aidan Chambers's phrase) 'an intergalactic reader' (1993, p.13), wanting to explore way beyond the familiar, to extend the frontiers of the imagination.

Sheena:

Sheena was a lively talkative girl who played a prominent role in class discussions and she was an enthusiastic contributor to our book club deliberations. Sheena preferred narrative fiction with realistic characters and plots, stories "that you could imagine happening in real life". She enjoyed Irish historical fiction - one of her favourites was *Under the Hawthorn Tree*

(Conlon - McKenna, 1990). However she disliked reading narratives about war and had a strong antipathy to the *Buffy* series. "That's all they ever talk about," Sheena complained. "I don't like *Buffy* and they just keep talking about it." As the others in the group started to express a preference for adolescent and even adult fiction rather than children's literature, Sheena initially stood her ground, seeking agency through resistance. "I like to read children's books," she insisted. "I don't want to read stuff like *Buffy*." Eventually, in third year, she stopped coming to our meetings. Reading is one of the discourses implicated in subjectivity (Voloshinov, 1973) and I think that perhaps Sheena felt disaffirmed as a reader by the others' implied rejection of the narratives she enjoyed and by what she perceived to be asymmetries in the conversational exchange.

Lisa and Sinead:

Lisa and Sinead were best friends who enjoyed *Point Horror* and agreed to differ over *Harry Potter*. Like Clodagh they rarely contributed to class discussions but found a voice in the book club. Sinead had a great sense of humour, often sharing a joke about something she had read, while Lisa's comments tended to be acerbic and to the point - ("I just think *Harry Potter*'s childish and stupid.") Like Clodagh, Sinead enjoyed Irish Historical fiction "but not war and that kind of thing. It makes me too worried!"

Both girls were fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Jeanette:

Jeanette's attendance at our sessions was intermittent as they sometimes clashed with her music lessons. A vivacious, outgoing girl, she enjoyed sharing her enthusiasm for books. "I like all kinds of books," she commented. "I couldn't go for a day without reading something."

A fan of *Harry Potter* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, she also liked to read realistic stories which dealt with teenage issues. She confided:

You want to be an individual, to find out who you are really.

Reading helps you to delve into that.

One of the key questions I wanted to focus on in my research was the ways in which we make sense of texts and much of our discussion centred on this topic. I have argued that readers develop their expertise through the actual process of reading (Culler, 1975; Meek, 1988) and all the members of the group had early memories of enjoying the experience of reading and being encouraged to read by family members. Clodagh commented:

I think I take my love of reading from my mum. There's nothing she likes better than to sit and read.

Jeanette added:

As you grow up you develop your own taste but I always looked forward when I was younger to Saturdays, because my grandad would buy me a book. I remember he bought me a beautiful book called, *The Far Side of the Lough*, by Polly Devlin (1983). I really loved the stories in it.

We also talked about the kind of books the girls had enjoyed in primary seven, the ones that had stayed in their memories. The narratives they talked about, *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, (Conlon McKenna, 1996) *The Twist of Gold* (Morpurgo, 1991), *The Hiring Fair* (O'Hara, 1993), all historical fiction set in Ireland, have strong story lines and boldly drawn characters, features which the pupils identified as prerequisites of memorable narratives for young readers. Their choice of titles reflects the wider cultural interest in history in Irish society as evidenced by the growth of historical fiction for children set in Ireland, in the post-colonial context of changing ideologies of national identity (Keenan, 1997). The famine of the 1840s has attracted more attention from children's writers in Ireland than any other historical event and a particular favourite with the group is *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, a story about three orphaned children, who set out on a journey across Ireland to find their relatives and who, despite all the odds stacked against them, triumph over adversity. It is the motif of *testing*, Bakhtin (1981) suggests, which facilitates

the interweaving of exciting adventure and moral dilemma in narratives of this type. The pupils commented on how reading a book like this can be inspirational, stimulating interest in a particular historical period and highlighting the role of story in the acquisition of knowledge. Sheena had read this book several times and she confided:

I love books about the famine, how people struggled to survive and so on. In *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, you can actually imagine yourself being there. It brought you into the story. It was as if you lived next door and you knew about everything that was happening!

One of Jeanette's favourite authors in primary school had been Roald Dahl, whose overwhelming popularity with young readers has been documented in a number of surveys (Hall and Coles, 1999; Millard, 1997)). She had read his books over and over again and in third year, still went back to them. The phenomenon of rereading is a significant aspect of literary and social practice and it was one that we explored in our discussions. In the next section I will focus on why certain narratives have such a strong emotional resonance for these young readers.

In Search of Lost Time

There is a story that for me comes before all other stories I read and of which all the stories I read seems to carry an echo, immediately lost. In my readings I do nothing but seek that book read in my childhood, but what I remember of it is too little to enable me to find it again. (Calvino, 1993, p. 250).

During our conversations it became clear that certain books have a particular emotional resonance for young readers and they continue to draw sustenance from these narratives, returning to them again and again. Jeanette had reread Roald Dahl's books several times and in third year still went back to them. She explained:

It's just that his books are so good. They're so magical. He's a great person for using all these big words; they're serious but at the same time, they're mixed with comedy.

As well as enjoying the fantasy elements and comic moments, Jeanette was drawn by the lexical richness of the books. She commented on the energy of the language:

With Roald Dahl, it's the language really; it's just that you want to get your teeth into it. He describes things so brilliantly, it just clicks. It's not just the story, it's the descriptions and so on the language he uses he doesn't just describe something, he puts in small details like in *Miss Trunchbull*; you can actually recognize these in people you meet. You can *see Miss Trunchbull* in your mind.

In the light of Jeanette's commentary, we can envision the reader positioned as participant and spectator. As Jeanette explains, the language has a magnetic quality, paradoxically drawing the reader into the imaginary world of the text but at the same time focusing the reader's attention on its lexical vitality. Here is how Jeanette explains it:

You can get into his books so quickly, they just lull you straight in it's like the special effects in a film; at certain points you just step back and enjoy the images on the screen. In Roald Dahl's books, the language makes you step back and appreciate it.

Fantasy is an expression of desire and the power of the imaginary world Dahl evokes is captured in the metaphorical trope which Jeanette uses to describe it:

He creates his own dream world that takes you out of this world, into a new world, a kind of magic bubble.

One of the delights of rereading is the ease of entry into the familiar world of the narrative and the pleasure of recognition it produces. Sinead, like Sheena and Jeanette, had discovered Harry Potter in third year and she suggested:

I think it's like Harry Potter; once you've read them it's like going back into a familiar world and it's just like lifting back a curtain and immersing yourself in it.

One of Clodagh's favourite books in primary school was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and she had read it 'more times than I can remember'. She draws an analogy between the children entering the world of Narnia and the reader engaging with narrative fiction:

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children enter Narnia and it's like a dream world where time stands still. I think it's the same kind of experience when you open the book.¹

Rereading can be interpreted as a journey into the psyche, a symbolic return to the Imaginary, in an atemporal space like the realm of dreams, where the interplay of imagination, identity and memory facilitates the 'reconstruction of the felt past in the present' (Chodorow, 1989, p.4) in the ongoing narrativization of selfhood. I have suggested that narrative is one of the ways through which we construct our sense of identity. We cannot unravel storied from unstoried selves (Booth, 1988, p.228); our perception of reality is influenced by the narratives we have read. In every story there is the echo of other stories. We are haunted by the ghosts of stories long since read. Perhaps we can interpret rereading as a search for lost time, a conjuring of presence out of absence, engendering through its collocation of past, present and future a sense of *time no longer* in which the continuity of selfhood seems assured. In the words of Barthes rereading:

draws the text out of its internal chronology and recaptures a mythic time (Barthes, 1975, p.16)

¹ See Rowe (1987) cited in Sarland (1991)

Through her engagement with the text, the reader recaptures ‘the structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1998, p.53) created through the interweaving of lived and imagined experience. Clodagh suggests tentatively:

Sometimes if you read a book when you were a child and you read it again, you feel as if you were a child again.

R: That’s interesting. Have you experienced that yourself Clodagh?

Clodagh: I think so, yes. I read *The Silver Sword* (Serrailier, 1956) when I was younger and I read it again recently and the kinds of feelings I had then came back. My brother, he’s five and he has this book that I used to have when I was younger, and when I was reading it to him, it was almost as if I was his age again.

Sheena then shared with us her response to *Ann of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1994 [1908]). She began:

Would you like to know how many times I’ve read that book?

R: How many?

Sheena: About a thousand million times! I really, really love the book. It’s brilliant ’cause my mammy, when I was about nine or ten ... it was her got me into it because I had *Scarlet Fever* and she brought me the book to read. I just love it. You can just imagine it ... the way Ann’s an orphan and she was so alone and when she went to live with Matthew and Marilla they really loved her as their own child.

R: Would you still go back to it?

Sheena: Sometimes I do and each time I get more out of it.

For Sheena, the book has become ‘a transitional object’, invested with symbolic value, a metaphorical affirmation of identity, a template of the idealized self-in-relation (Chodorow, 1989). Her use of hyperbole, (she has read the book *a thousand, million times*), encapsulates the emotional intensity invested in the reading experience (Crago, 1993). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses this type of compulsive repetition and suggests that it may serve to contain anxiety by creating a sense of being in control, of mastery over experience (Brown, 1961). It is also a way of savouring again and again the *atmosphere* of the narrative, of reliving the emotional experience generated through the interaction of reader and text. Rereading creates a sense of intimacy with the text; the narrative becomes part of the fabric of the inner monologue of thought, an internal resource in the negotiation of identity.

I have spoken of the shadowy doubleness of the reader, acting out the dual role of onlooker and participant, impelled by the desire to *know*, to explore the hermeneutic potential of the text. One of the pleasures of rereading would appear to spring from the desire to *know more*, to make ‘a new discovery among the folds of the sentence’ (Calvino, 1993, p.249). Here is how Jeanette explains it:

In Harry Potter, when you’ve read it once, you want to read it again and again. You feel almost as if you’re friends with the characters; you want to know *everything* about the world of the book. For example, there are so many details and you just want to know more and more.

Sheena: When you read Harry Potter again you think to yourself, “Oh, I didn’t even realize that.”

Jeanette: Yes, that’s right. I remember reading the first book over again and thinking, ‘Oh, so *that’s* what happened!’

Sinead adds:

It really catches your imagination; there's just so much in it – quidditch and all the magical creatures. It's just fascinating reading about how they spend their time, the things they do at school and so on. You know it's not real, yet it seems real. It's as if you're actually experiencing it.

The notion of the *experiential* nature of the reading process is taken up by Sheena who volunteers:

I think when you're reading a book, it's like an experience; you're going through something. When you finish it you feel you've learnt something. It's like going on a journey; the first time it's the novelty of it but when you go back again it's recognizing familiar landmarks, but you're seeing them in a new light.

This process of 'reaccentuation' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.421) is highlighted by Jeanette, who comments:

When you read a book again, there are so many questions in your head that you want to go back and see it more clearly. It's like music; you want to listen to it again, maybe for the lyrics or maybe for the drumbeat in the background. When you go back to a book, you ask *different* questions and so you learn new things.

The sameness and difference of the experience is encapsulated by Calvino (1993) who writes:

Everytime I seek to relive the emotion of a previous reading, I experience different and unexpected impressions ... (p.249).

Clodagh makes a similar point, drawing once again on the analogy of a journey:

If you read a book when you're younger and then go back to it, you discover more about *yourself*; you relate it to your life, you relate it to the ways you've changed your ideas; you have more experience of how the characters might have felt in the dilemmas they faced and so on.

Rereading is like a reconstruction of the past in memory; the reader modifies her interpretation in the knowledge of what comes after and in the light of her own experience.

In examining the nature of the rereading process, I have highlighted the emotional and intellectual pleasure felt by the reader in developing her awareness of herself as a thinking, experiencing person, in exploring the hermeneutical potential of the narrative, in becoming part of an imagined community by 'penetrating further into the spirit of the text' (Calvino, 1993, p.249). I have suggested that the process of reading with *foresight* creates a sense of continuity in the construction of selfhood and that books which have a special resonance for the reader enable her to recapture 'the structure of feeling' (Williams, 1998, p.53) refracted through the rhythms of the text, its words, imagery and patterns. The evidence that emerges from these young readers suggests that the sense of emotional security engendered through interaction with a cherished story may provide an inner resource which affirms and strengthens their sense of selfhood.

Our book club meetings carried on throughout Year 10 and by that stage all members of the group (except Sheena), had begun to develop an interest in adolescent and adult fiction. In the next section, I will focus on their interpretation of realism, their engagement with character and the ways in which they negotiate the relationship between lived and imagined experience.

Word and World

In a way, you've come out of childhood, you want to see more of the world, the big wide world and you just want to explore really. Jeanette

A key feature of the group's reading development was their growing interest in adolescent and adult fiction. For these as for many young people, horror was a genre of choice (Sarland, 1991). I have suggested that reading is a 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102) and all of these readers had 'graduated' from Goosebumps to Point Horror to the novels of Stephen King.

Clodagh explained:

Stephen King writes for adults and he goes into the horror stuff more deeply. I think he is more into the horror of the human mind - the kind of nightmarish stuff that comes to happen.

Jeanette added:

I think Point Horror is more for children really. These's more detail in Stephen King. He describes things better.

A primary concern of Gothic fiction lies in the workings of the mind and this accords with the adolescent's developing interest in the psychology of the individual. All the girls had encountered a range of horror texts in the film as well as the print versions and both expressed a preference for the books.

Jeanette commented:

If you compare the book and the film, I think books go more deeply into the psychology of horror so that you can understand it more.

Clodagh responded:

I think the books are more scary because they describe what's going on in the person's mind whereas the film can't do that. If you're reading what a person is *thinking* about then that makes you think the same way and if the person feels *really* scared you feel really scared too.

Lisa: In books, you can get into people's thoughts and feelings but in the film you can't.

Clodagh: I think teenagers are more interested in how the mind works and that kind of thing.

What emerges from this discussion is the extent to which these young people are interested in the inner lives of characters, their thoughts and emotions, the ways in which they negotiate their subjectivities. I have argued that the individual is defined and understood in terms of intersubjective relations. Narrative as a metaphorical representation of consciousness gives the reader a unique insight into the dialogical nature of subjectivity, how it is constructed out of:

a play of appropriated discourses, voices, images, memories and desires (McCallum, 1999, p.94).

My Year 10 readers are developing an awareness of the disjuncture between the 'I who perceives' and the 'I who is perceived', a realization that the two are not self-identical and that the gap which opens up between them may be the site of conflicting desires and emotions (Lacan, 1977). Narrative offers an in-between space in which readers may accept, reject or interrogate the imaginary resolution of such conflicts.

I have argued that narrative is inherently dialogical in terms of the interplay between reader and text, the interaction between character and the range of discourses represented in the narrative and the intersubjective relations inscribed within the text. These represented relations, I have argued, are analogous to the relationship between individuals and the discursive practices of society. The thoughts and feelings of characters, their motivation, how they develop, the tension generated by the desire to be unique and the fear of alienation are all aspects of narrative which appear to have a particular resonance for teenagers. One of the criteria which adolescents draw on in their evaluation of narrative is that of realism (Appleyard, 1991; Sarland, 1991). Their requirement for realism, I would suggest, does not *exclude* fantasy. What

I think they are searching for is a fictional enactment of issues that are of a salient concern to them, issues to do with identity, relationships, peer pressure, the *meaning* of life. In tandem with their developing realization of the complexity of these issues, adolescents are also becoming more aware of the darker side of human life.

As Jeanette comments:

I think when you start to read the newspapers and watch TV,
you begin to realize that life isn't always like the fairy stories
- happy ever after.

This idea is developed by Clodagh when she argues that imagined experience must not be wholly incompatible with lived experience:

Well, whenever you write a story, the story is supposed to be about some element of life. It might be a life in another world or a life set in this world but it is always to do with people's lives and people's lives always have ups and downs; they don't always turn out the way you might have expected and the writer just can't even if she wants the story to end happily, she might not be able to.

The exemplar Clodagh used was of the ending to *The Final Journey* (Pausewang, 1996), the harrowing story of the transportation of Jewish prisoners to a concentration camp. The story is told from the perspective of eleven year old *Alice*, who together with her grandfather is loaded into a cattle truck on a journey to death. Clodagh summed up her feelings about the book:

I thought it was really sad but very worthwhile, because it tells of all the horrors that the prisoners experienced on the way to the camp and I think it's important to know that.

R: Did you think that the ending fitted in with the story?

Clodagh: Yes, definitely. Any other ending just wouldn't have been *true*.

Frye (1965) suggests that the quest for identity is at the centre of all stories but I would argue that it has a unique resonance for teenagers at a time of accelerated transition in their lives. Jeanette shared with the group her response to a book which encapsulates this theme, *Face* by Zephaniah (1999). The novel is set against the background of multi-cultural London. It tells the story of *Martin Turner*, a lively, good looking teenager, popular with his school friends and the leader of a gang of three. His world is irrevocably changed when one night he accepts a lift from a couple of joyriders high on drugs and is involved in a serious car crash. Despite plastic surgery, his face is left horribly scarred and he is hospitalised for a considerable time. In the aftermath of the accident, he is forced to reflect on his own values and those of society, to reassess the nature and meaning of friendship and to reconsider what is important to him in life. For Jeanette, the book was 'an eye-opener'. It had made her 'think about life and what it means'. She admired the courage and determination of the protagonist.

Jeanette: What I really liked about him was when he was in hospital - his second day in hospital he asked for a mirror and they wouldn't give him one and they called a psychiatrist and he came down and advised him to wait for a while but he refused. He wanted the mirror and he took a glance and then he looked away and forced himself to take another glance. I liked the way he was absolutely determined. He wasn't just lying there feeling sorry for himself. His friends came to visit but you could tell they didn't really want to. They were only doing it out of a sense of duty. They didn't really want to come. After a while, his girlfriend stopped coming as well. Martin had met another boy in hospital and he had been born disfigured and the thought of what this boy had had to put up with all his life made Martin all the more determined that he was going to get on with it and that's what I really liked about him, his

determination. He had been a leader and he wasn't regarded as a leader anymore.

R: So, he'd lost that?

Jeanette: He'd lost that but in a way I think that was alright because what he said was that he'd learnt who he actually was and that was more important to him than being a leader.

R: The experience led to a crisis in identity for him?

Jeanette: Yes, but he was able to make a new life for himself because when they stopped being his friends, he made new friends. He became captain of the gymnastics team and he entered into a competition and he didn't win but he didn't let it annoy him whereas before it might have done.

R: Do you think that kind of book encourages you to reflect on your own experience?

Jeanette: Yes it is an eye-opener. Even now, it's the same thing - I mean you have to fit in.

Clodagh: Yeah

Jeanette: You have to wear the right clothes, you have to wear your hair a certain way, you have to go to the right places. It's not cool to do homework or whatever.

Clodagh: And that's what he's done, he's broken away. He's stepped away from being careful.

Jeanette: He's broken away from all of that and he's said, 'Well, look' ...

Clodagh: I don't care ...

Jeanette: I don't care ...

Clodagh: I'm going to be myself.

Jeanette: I'm going to be myself and you know ...

R: Do you think it's possible to do that?

Jeanette: You can but it's very hard. There are always going to be people who put pressure on you.

It is interesting to note the dialogical nature of this exchange, the way in which the voices interanimate each other. In her response Jeanette shows a developing awareness of the complex interaction between subjectivity and social process, the gap between a desire for agentive selfhood and the reality of peer pressure to conform. In *Face*, the fictional selfhood inscribed in the text implies agentive subjectivity but it is an identity which is forged through a process of hegemonic accommodation and resistance (Bakhtin, 1981; Gramsci, 1971). The protagonist is popular and good looking; in the immediate aftermath of his accident he loses this but in the process of re-evaluating his life, he succeeds, with the help of new friends, in carrying out a potentially more fulfilling way of life. The tension between the desire for agency and the fear of social alienation is a very real source of anxiety for adolescents and a narrative which shows how these tensions might be resolved is deeply reassuring for teenage readers.

In elucidating the relationship between actual and symbolic worlds, I have suggested that narrative presents us with a repertoire of possible selves; in the process of the negotiation of our own subjectivity, we match these possible selves to our own construction of selfhood forming illusory images of ourselves out of mirrored others in the ongoing negotiation of our identities. I asked the group:

Do you think when you read books, you tend to relate them to your own situation, to make comparisons with it?

Jeanette: Yeah, I think so 'cos when I was reading *Girls Under Pressure* (Wilson, 1999), I was thinking, "God, I'm just like Ellie. I have the same kind of hang-ups as she has". It made me realize I'm not the only one. Everyone has the same kind of problems.

Sinead developed this point, highlighting the value of narratives which deal with teenage issues as *instructional* texts, lending themselves to reading *effeferently*, in Rosenblatt's sense of the term (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Sinead: Do you know what I noticed? I was reading *Girls Under Pressure* and I thought, she's got the serious aspect of it - you know, issues dealing with girls our age and she got the point across but at the same time, she made it funny with the kind of things she described.

R: What sort of issues?

Jeanette: Well, you know at the start *Zoe* has a big problem with her weight and *Ellie* was saying that she didn't want to be like *Zoe* but she gets skinnier and skinnier and yet she still thinks she's fat. Then at the very end she wises up. I think Jacqueline Wilson manages to put across the seriousness of that kind of situation for teenagers and I would certainly recommend it. I think it's actually a good book for advice as well as the story.

R: Is there a particular pattern in Jacqueline Wilson's books, do you think?

Jeanette: Well, in all her books the situation is like ... okay, in *Double Act* (Wilson, 2001), they have no mother; in *Girls Under Pressure*, *Ellie* hasn't got a mother. In nearly every book, the children either live with one parent or don't have any parents. I get the impression that's Jacqueline Wilson's view of what the world is like today.

Clodagh: It's the same kind of thing in *Harry Potter*.

Sinead: *Buffy*, she's living with her mother. Her parents are divorced.

R: Why do you think there is that pattern?

Sinead: I think it helps readers to relate to the characters, if someone is actually in that situation.

R: You think it helps the reader to cope?

Sinead: I think so because you look at the character and you think to yourself, "Well, I'm going to be as strong as she is. If she can do it, then so can I."

I have spoken of the impossibility of unravelling storied from unstoried selves; knowledge and understanding, *virtual* experience gleaned from narratives is fed back into our lives. Through their response, Jeanette and Sinead negotiate the relationship of imagined and lived experience, drawing on narrative as an interpretive frame for their own lives, engaging in a dialogue about current and possible selfhood. These young readers use narrative to explore possibilities for agency in their own lives, reflecting on the fictional representation of selfhood and evaluating the extent to which imaginary constructions of selfhood embody the kind of selves they could become, the kind of selves they want to become and the kind of selves they are fearful of becoming.

I will now go on to discuss the third and final strand of my research in which I focus on the responses of two Year 10 classes to a shared text, *Under Goliath* by Peter Carter (1980).

Research Project C.

Shared Readings - The Interpretive Community.

As I have detailed in the methodology section, my action research was based on a pilot project which I undertook in 1997. I have given an account of the pilot study in the methodology section, explaining how the outcome shaped the development of the research. I will now go on to show how, drawing on a model of critical pedagogy, I explored the dialogic interaction between reader and text, focusing on the interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology of the text. In elucidating that relationship I have utilized a range of theoretical perspectives including cultural theory, reader response, and narratology.

Reading Otherways:

What you see depends on who is looking and from what ideological vantage point (Paul, 1998, p. 10).

The third strand of my research, which drew on the pilot study, was carried out with two Year 10 band 1 and 2 classes, in the autumn term of 1998. Once again I chose *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980) for shared reading as it had been very popular with the classes who had studied it in the pilot project and it offered scope for developing students' understanding of the complex ways in which culture is negotiated and extending critical awareness through ideology critique (Giroux, 1984). As I have outlined in the methodology section, the 1990s was a period of considerable political turbulence in Northern Ireland, a time of high tension alternating with jubilation in which questions of political and cultural identity were foregrounded.

I have argued that the full potential of a narrative emerges only in the social, historical and cultural context in which it is situated and if students are to make connections between the literary text and the social text (Scholes, 1985), they need to develop an understanding of the discourses surrounding the production as well as the reception of the texts with which they engage. The school curriculum also represents attitudes and values which may constrain or

empower pupils, for example in relation to ability grouping policies. The classroom, in which the official and unofficial worlds of school jostle for position will invariably be the locus of a web of conflictual as well as consensual relations (Maybin, 1993). My Year 10 classes formed an interpretive community but it was not homogeneous; a variety of heteroglossic voices (Bakhtin, 1981) intermingled in the development of response to *Under Goliath*, which I will now briefly introduce.

Under Goliath

This novel, by Peter Carter (1980), is set in Belfast in 1969 and tells the story of two boys, one a Catholic, the other a Protestant who strike up a very uneasy friendship in the growing tension and hostility between their respective communities. The book begins with a prologue in which the protagonist, *Alan Kenton*, now a soldier, discovers that *Fergus*, the Catholic boy with whom he had once shared a brief friendship, has been killed by a mortar shell while on active service in a remote mountainous area of Cyprus. It is clear from *Alan's* reaction to the news that the friendship had made a lasting impression on him. In the intervening years he has come to realize the futility of the conflict in Northern Ireland and rails against 'the waste and folly of it all' (p.168). This sense of futility is heightened by the narrative technique of the double. The emphasis is on the commonality of both *Fergus's* and *Alan's* experiences: the huddle of narrow streets in which they grew up, the potent religious and political symbolism embedded in the culture, the rituals of belonging and exclusion, a shared love of books and music. The mirroring effect of the double highlights the distorted perception of reality in a divided society where sameness is interpreted as difference and lived narratives are dominated by oppositional thinking. Although identity in the novel is defined predominantly in religious terms, the complex conditions which produced the struggle are referred to obliquely; the ideological roots of the conflict are exposed as having their origins in historical struggle, competing narratives of national identity, socio-economical inequalities and asymmetrical power relations. These views are expressed by *Billy*, the older brother of the protagonist, a trade union activist, who sees the conflict in terms of a class struggle and whose arguments with *Uncle Jack*, portrayed as a loyalist bigot, form the most overt agent of ideology and position *Billy* as the custodian of authorized discourse. His

carefully wrought arguments contrast with the rancorous bombast of *Uncle Jack* whose portrayal verges on caricature, a type of characterization which Genette (1980, p.185) defines as:

The point where the extreme of realism borders on pure unreality.

The structure of the narrative is an interesting one in that we learn in the prologue how the story ended and the narrative is related retrospectively by the protagonist *Alan* to an intradiegetic narratee, who is a fellow soldier. In the epilogue, *Alan* reflects on the events that he has narrated, expressing his feelings of anger and frustration at what he sees as the divisiveness of religion, the capriciousness of fate and the futility of a seemingly endless conflict. However the bleakness of the ending is somewhat recuperated by the sense of perpetuity engendered by the depiction of the cityscape as an ongoing narrative, one which transcends the immediacy of time by reaching out into the past and future, extending human consciousness beyond the present (Ricoeur, 1981).

But the city does not mind; it is oblivious to me and my brief purpose. Its life goes on, though multitudes come and go, as if they had never been. And for everyone who goes another is born, to live, marry and die among its huddled streets, under its smoke and sullen sky, and under the shadow of Goliath (p. 169).

In relation to the novel, my pedagogical aims were to help students develop critical and creative thinking through dialogic interaction and reflection on the text, moving beyond personal response to cultural critique (Scholes, 1985). Students had the opportunity to work collaboratively in small group discussions, drama and role play, as well as sharing their responses in dialogue journals (Hackman, 1987).

The Hollow Space

The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7).

I have located both my practice and study within the framework of critical pedagogy in that I am interested in questions concerning the dialogue between structure and agency, the relationship of representation, identity and ideology and the possibilities for student empowerment through cultural critique in the day to day world of the classroom. The kind of questions I wanted to ask are those which would help students develop their critical literacy:

Who is speaking and what differences does this make?

What strategies does the writer use to convey the illusion of reality?

How do the voices in the text reflect particular attitudes?

In the course of the pilot study, one of the aspects of the novel which most students had commented on was the sense of verisimilitude, ‘the livingness’ of the story, which Langer, (1953, p. 292) argues may be greater than that of actual experience. Typical of this kind of response was Sheena’s comment:

This book is not just a book to me, it’s like a story someone has set you down to read about their life.

Some pupils in the pilot study thought initially that the narrative was autobiographical and I would argue that in a realist genre this is an understandable response, since there is no textual property through which the fictional status of discourse can be identified and as Harding (1967, p. 307) suggests, recognition of the fictionality of a work is a sophisticated achievement. In its representation of a cultural, social and political world

which seemed familiar, the novel appeared to have a unique resonance for my Year 10 students. Manguel (1996, p. 267) suggests that:

We readers like Narcissus like to believe that the text into which we gaze holds our reflection.

My Year 10 readers looked into this particular text and felt a jolt of recognition, word and world ‘in continual mutual interaction’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 254). It was clear from their journal entries as well as group and class discussion that they had all been affected to some extent by the conflict, many expressing the view that their lives had been overshadowed by the tension and anxiety generated by the political situation. It seemed from their responses that this particular novel had penetrated to the reality of their experience. I have argued that it is crucial for their development that readers enhance their awareness of the constructedness of texts. *Under Goliath* belongs to the genre designated by Belsey (1980) as classic realism but by focusing on representation as a signifying practice, we can open up the text to critical enquiry, turning it into an *interrogative* text (Belsey, 1980). In this research report I will show how, drawing on literary theory, I endeavoured to help pupils develop their understanding of how this particular text is constructed in relation to point of view, representation of reality and gender construction.

Point of View

I have argued that fictional narrative is imbued with ideology and point of view is a key element in its inscription. In *Under Goliath*, while the story is told from the point of view of the narrator’s younger self, the ideology is that of the adult (Chatman, 1978). The voice of the protagonist mingles with a range of other voices in the novel but few of the voices are in harmony. Verbal interaction is conflictual, polemical, cacophonous, a polyphony of discourse enmeshed in relations of power. One of the questions students addressed both in small group discussions and in their dialogue journals was, “Whose story is this and what difference does it make?” In their response journals, most students aligned themselves with the subject position of the first person narrator, although a distancing effect was maintained by the differences in political and cultural affiliation. In her response to this question, Sheena, for

example, cited the fact that the reader has access to *Alan's* consciousness as the reason for her empathetic response:

In this book, *Alan* is the narrator and this book is concentrated on his thoughts and feelings. I like the way the author did this because although I did not agree with all that *Alan* said, I could relate to some of things he was saying and that made the book seem more realistic.

Sinead recognizes that there are different versions of reality, depending on who *sees*. She writes:

This story was told from *Alan's* point of view and I think if *Fergus* had told the story his way, the book would be very different because there are always two sides to a story.

Many of the students had read *The Twelfth Day of July* (Lingard, 1973) which portrays the relationship between two children from either side of the sectarian divide. The alternating chapters present life from the points of view of each of the protagonists. Some students expressed a preference for this approach, suggesting that it was more in keeping with the theme of overcoming prejudice. Lisa wrote:

This story is told from the point of view of a first person narrator which I find very one sided... biased because it told the story from the point of view of one religion and not the other.

Her opinion was shared by Siobhan who wrote:

I don't think I like the way one person is telling the story. I like to hear other people's thoughts and feelings as well.

A number of students aligned with the subject position of *Fergus* which may have been due, at least in part, to identification in terms of religious and

cultural affiliation (Marriott, 1985); however their journal entries echoed Genette's insight that:

Systematically adopting the point of view of one of the protagonists permits the author to leave the feelings of the other one almost completely in shadow and thus to construct for that other, at little cost, a mysterious and ambiguous personality (Genette, 1980, p. 201).

Aine wrote:

I would have to say I liked *Fergus* the best because I didn't know as much about him and so I was more interested in him.

Her view is shared by Roisin who writes:

My favourite character was *Fergus*; if I had a chance to meet a character in the book it would be him. He seems so laid back and there is an air of mystery about him because he doesn't really talk about himself much and this makes him appear more interesting.

And Olivia:

Fergus was my favourite character as he had a sense of mystery. I noticed when *Alan* asked him particular questions he would try to change the subject as if he did not want to answer. This made him seem more mysterious and aroused my curiosity.

One of the themes of *Under Goliath* is that of the dialogic interaction of the individual and society; the text dramatizes the interplay between the formation of identity and cultural and social practices, showing that individuals are both constrained and empowered by social and cultural discourses (Bakhtin, 1981).

Picking up on this theme, Clodagh writes:

I think neither *Alan* nor *Fergus* are to blame for the end of their friendship, the society is to blame. I think the pressure on them just got too great.

The view expressed by Sheena is similar:

This book shows the influence of *Jack* and people like him when they're powerful enough to try to destroy the friendship of *Alan* and *Fergus*. I think the pressures of prejudice were responsible for ending their friendship.

In this section of the report, I have attempted to show how pupils developed their understanding of narrative point of view by considering the question, "Whose story is it and what difference does it make?"

In the next section I will show how students analysed the strategies used by the writer to represent the text as reality.

The Circular Memory

The realistic author spends his time referring back to books. Reality is what has been written (Barthes, 1975, p.39)

In their journals, the aspect of *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980) which students commented on most frequently was the sense of reality engendered by the text. Drawing on the notion of the novel inhabiting an intertextual space, we explored the relationship between the text and its intertexts, in relation to the strategies adopted by the writer to convey the illusion of reality. The concept of intertextuality is central to Bakhtinian theory (1981, 1983, 1984); it implies that meaning is produced by the dialogic interaction between a text and its intertexts. In *SZ*, Barthes (1975) demonstrates how the world of the narrative is made up of a network of codes which he designates 'off stage voices' (1975, p.21). In their discussions and written work, students explored how the dialogic interplay of these voices contributes to the making of meaning,

considering, for example, how ontological differences between history and fiction are masked by the ways in which historical data and fictive events are interwoven, transforming historical 'reality' and intensifying its ideological signification. The interplay of fact and fiction serves to authenticate the world of the text, encouraging the reader to regard the fictive world as congruent with the actual world. 'Real' events, such as the attack on the Silent Valley reservoir (21st April 1969), become fictions within the story and actual individuals, Jackie Onassis, Bernadette Devlin, Terence O'Neill, mingle with fictional characters in the imaginary world of the narrative, imbuing it with 'the glow of reality' (Barthes 1975, p.102). In her commentary on this aspect of the novel, Louise writes:

In this book, there are numerous real life events mentioned such as the sinking of the Titanic and the moon landing. There are also lots of real people included such as Bernadette Devlin and Terence O'Neill. For me this makes the book more interesting because it makes the fictional characters appear real.

Sheena comments:

I think the writer includes all of these connections to real life because it makes the story more realistic if the reader already knows the names of some of the people in it. It makes it easier for the reader to relate it to life and it gives the impression that it might be a true story.

In her response, Roisin draws attention to the affective nature of the literary experience expressing the view that it is this aspect of response that enhances the sense of 'a dynamic happening' (Iser, 1978, p.22):

I really enjoyed this book. The way in which it is written makes you feel as if you are actually there. When I read it I actually felt slightly depressed because it made me feel as if I was right there in the middle of the Troubles. I like that kind of feeling when I read a book. The way it's written, you

almost feel as if Fergus is your best friend and it is really sad when he dies.

Barthes reminds us that the ‘‘I’ which approaches the text is itself already a plurality of other texts.’ (1975, p.10). I have argued that it is impossible to disentangle storied from unstoried selves, that because of the ways in which narrative shapes our thought processes, the symbolic world can be perceived as an aspect of the actual world. Literature and life, as Bakhtin (1981) reminds us, are ‘indissolubly tied up with each other’ (1981, p.254), and we possess ‘a series of inner genres for seeing and conceptualizing reality’ (Medvedev/ Bakhtin, 1978 p. 134).

Christine is adopting this perspective when she writes:

Whenever the author makes connections to other stories, it actually makes the book more realistic because we’re familiar with these other stories. Like for example, when Alan twirls the gun round his finger, I know he’s imagining himself as a cowboy and when he describes the gunman as a character in a gangster movie, I know exactly what he means because I’ve seen movies like that myself. The fact that he talks about the stories he’s read and the films he’s seen makes it appear like he lives in the real world.

One of the ways in which a sense of the real world is achieved is through the establishment of a setting which is easily identifiable, not just in relation to the streets and so on (a map is provided on page four of the novel) but also in terms of the particularity of its depiction, the metonymous huddle of narrow streets, the wall murals linking past and present, the familiar landmark of the eponymous crane reputed to be the largest in the world. The creation of the ‘dual landscape of action and consciousness’ (Bruner, 1986, p.66), enhances the sense of verisimilitude and forges a psychological bond with the reader, a bond which springs from the pleasure of recognition, the sense of identity engendered by the dramatization of experiences which echo their own, familiarizing the unfamiliar and making strange the familiar (Iser 1978). The effect is enhanced by the intimate, conversational tone adopted by the

protagonist in his depiction of the imagined community and the small dramas enacted in its narrow streets. Lois writes:

It doesn't seem like a fictional story; it's like you are talking to someone after there has been a night of rioting. The narrator tells it in a way that makes you feel as if you are running up and down the road with him, watching everything happen.

Katherine Patterson (1981, p.85) describes setting as 'the very stuff with which the story will be woven' and its psychological significance is recognised by Sheena in her comment:

The setting is really important in this story and it is carried on throughout the book as a main feature. As I live in Northern Ireland, I know the way the world works here and I can relate to the setting and fully comprehend it. It makes the book so much more realistic.

In this section of my report, I have endeavoured to show how students, by examining the strategies adopted by the author to create the illusion of 'reality unfolding' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.7), developed their understanding of how texts are constructed. In the next section, I will demonstrate how students addressed the question, "How do the voices in the text reflect particular attitudes?" in relation to the construction of gender in the novel.

Changing the Subject: the Shadow in the Text

I have pointed out how, in the initial investigation, we focused on political and cultural issues in *Under Goliath*, (Carter, 1980), examining the tensions between the individual and community, exploring the dialogic nature of identity formation, forging connections between the social and verbal texts. Reflecting on the data after the completion of the initial study, I came across one brief journal entry which really made me stop and think.

Sheena had written:

Throughout the story, I felt that women didn't play a prominent role and were mostly seen by the men to be there for cooking and cleaning.

In focusing on the ideologies which take centre stage in a conflictual society, those of national and cultural identity, we had overlooked (all except Sheena, that is), the fissured nature of this particular text, its gaps, silences and contradictions in the representation of women. Having located my practice in the area of critical pedagogy, I wanted to ensure that students had the opportunity to critique the stereotypical gender images embedded within the text, addressing these issues in small group and whole class discussion, as well as in their dialogue journals. I am not suggesting that girls do not enjoy books with male protagonists; on the contrary, my students' engagement with this particular text, evidence from my research and from that of others (Johnston, D.M. *et al.*, 1984; Millard, 1994) shows that girls will align themselves with focal characters who are male. What I am arguing is that in this particular text, female characters are under - imagined, stereotyped and disempowered. In my report, I focus on the responses made by students in their dialogue journals.

Focal Characters

In *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980) the focal characters are boys in their early teens and a central theme in the novel is the development of a friendship between them, against the backdrop of a divided society. The ideology inscribed in the text implies the need for individuals to overcome prejudice by identifying commonality but in its clichéd portrayal of a tiny cast of female characters, the text relies on gender differences, thus reinforcing the stereotypes it purports to reject. In *Under Goliath* (Carter 1980, p.14), I would suggest that the explicit ideology which advocates tolerance, respect for the individual and cultural diversity, is at odds with the passive, unexamined ideology, the repressed meaning embedded in the textual unconscious (Jameson, 1981) which designates female characters as 'the inessential Other' (De Beauvoir, (1993 [1949] p.149). This male/ female dualism runs like a fault line through the substratum of the text. There are no significant female characters, except perhaps *Alan's* mother, whose existence is contingent on that of her family and

who, together with a few others like her, represents the ideal of womanhood, the archetypal 'good mother'. She is set in opposition to a largely undifferentiated assortment of other women who are represented as aberrations of the feminine. Here is how the narrator *Alan* describes them:

A lot of the women were just worried like my mam. They went on about the Catholics but they weren't vicious or anything but some of them were really awful. They were the ones like Mrs. Burns, never dressing up properly, traipsing about with slippers on and their hair not combed and always with a park drive sticking out of their mouths (Carter, 1980, p.149).

In her commentary, Sheena picks up on the oppositional stereotypes embedded in the ways in which women are represented and the homogenizing influence of language in the one dimensionality of their portrayal:

It's as if there are just two kinds of women, ones like his mother and the others like Mrs. Burns whose main fault seems to lie in their sloppy appearance. The male characters are all individuals but there is a sameness about the women; they are forever pouring cups of tea or standing in their doorways gossiping or gabbling.

The minor male characters, Uncle Jack, Archie Macphee and Sammy Mackracken do come under considerable critical scrutiny in the text but as Sheena points out, as characters they are fully imagined, exuberant, irrepressible, larger than life. The female characters are shadowy presences, hovering on the margins of the text. One of these is Ada, the wife of Uncle Jack, who believes that she can tell the future through reading the tea leaves:

Ada thought she could tell the future from tea leaves..... she filled a cup, swilled it around, poured the tea out, then stared into it. "What do you see?", Mrs Burns asked. Ada leaned forward, "There's trouble", she said.

I nearly burst out laughing at that. There had been nothing but trouble in Northern Ireland for months and here was Ada seeing it in a tea cup! (ibid., p. 61).

This is a humorous episode but nevertheless, it positions the female characters as whimsical, superstitious, intuitive in opposition to the rational male order (Hourihan, 1997). However, the ideology of the text is somewhat undercut by the fact that Ada sees in the cup the death of a family member and such a death does occur, a twist which is recognized by Lisa:

In this novel, women are made out to be gullible and ready to believe anything. For example when the Silent Valley reservoir is blown up thirty miles away, they all congregate in the street, looking up at the mountains, as if a tidal wave is suddenly going to appear and sweep them all away. However, in relation to Ada and the teacups, the women are proved right in a way because there really is a death as she foresaw.

In terms of setting, the rows of terraces and narrow streets perform an analogous function (Rimmon - Kenan, 1983, p.66), highlighting the marginal status of women and defining the small houses metonymically as female space. Challenging this perspective, Clodagh writes:

Women in this book are very old fashioned; they stay at home while the men go out to work. In this book women are shown as the weak gender and the only place for them is the kitchen. This is not a fair picture of women.

In exploring the text, the question we addressed was: "Who speaks and who is heard"? The voices of the women seem to merge, becoming monoglottic, the meaning undifferentiated, their attempts at self expression denigrated. In our discussions, one of the aspects we explored was the ubiquity of metaphors utilizing animal imagery in the text, implying that civilization is a thin veneer between the human and bestial. Several students noted this type of metaphor is frequently used to signify women's speech. Sheila comments:

Women are described as standing in their doorways, 'cackling like old hens', (p.16). There is no mention of old men cackling!

Sheena highlights the derogatory style of the inquit tags used to designate women's speech:

It's as if what women say doesn't really matter; the kind of words the writer uses, like natter, gas, blether, gossip suggest that it's all empty talk.

Jayne notes the silencing of women in relation to the discourse of politics, which is designated in the text as an exclusively male preserve:

In all the discussions about politics, it's only men who take part. There are no women mentioned.

In relation to the positioning of women in this text in terms of language, ideology and power, Macherey's dictum seems peculiarly apt:

Silence reveals speech – unless it is speech that reveals the silence (1990, p. 218).

I have argued that while students bring to the text their own repertoires, they also learn ways of reading from the context in which they read (Rabinowitz, 1987) and my pedagogical aim was to facilitate students in developing an extended dialogue with the text and with each other, a dialogue which would enable them to enhance their critical awareness of the social, cultural and ideological messages embedded in the text (Culler 1981; Scholes 1985).

In the final chapter, I will draw conclusions from my research, reflect on its limitations and signpost possible ways forward.

6. CONCLUSION

In drawing conclusions from my research, I shall consider my findings in relation to the questions with which I began: the nature of the process which creates literary meaning; the relationship between narrative and subjectivity; the ways in which response is influenced by the repertoire of the reader and the interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology inscribed within the text. I will then consider, in retrospect, the aspects of my research which I might have explored more fully and more fruitfully, identify opportunities for further research in this field and consider the implications of my research for teaching, learning and policy making. Finally, I will recount briefly the ways in which I have drawn on what I have learnt in developing further action research projects.

Role of the Reader

In examining the interplay between reader and text, I have drawn on reader response and cultural theory in characterizing the relationship as dialogical and ideological (Bakhtin, 1981; Medvedev, 1978; Voloshinov, 1973). Central to my thesis is the dynamic nature of the interaction between reader and text. In studying that interaction, I have drawn on the insights of Harding (1967,1977), conceptualizing the role of the reader as both spectator and participant, a metaphorical representation which has been availed of by other researchers, notably Fox (1979). The shadowy doubleness of the reader is graphically depicted by my Year 8 students in their journal entries where they compare their imagined presence in the narrative to that of ghosts, shadows, spectres, evaluating the story as it unfolds but at the same time feeling as if they are part of the action. In conceptualizing how the transaction between reader and text fits into the wider context of the relationship between literary and extra-literary discourse, I have drawn on the work of Bakhtin (1981), Ricoeur (1981) and Winnicott (1971). The relationship between actual and symbolic worlds is one that has been of considerable interest to a number of researchers. Sarland (1991) argues that the conflicting ideologies inscribed in the popular texts chosen by his young readers reflect similar conflicts in their own lives. Fry (1985) considers that for Helen, one of his young respondents, reading narrative fiction gives her the opportunity to reflect on her own experience. I

have suggested, following Winnicott (1971), that the fictional world can be envisioned as 'a third area', an in-between space where the reader can experience the interplay between lived and imagined narratives. The nature of that experience is lucidly articulated by Anna, in her description of how she drew on narrative as an emotional resource in coming to terms with the challenge of the transition from primary to secondary school. To borrow a phrase used by Heaney in relation to poetry, the therapeutic value of narrative may lie in the ways in which it:

matche[s] the meshes in the sieve life puts us through (1995, p.3).

Reading, I have argued is 'a zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102), a structure of possibilities (Bruner, 1986). In my study, Anna suggests that reading enhances our experience of life because:

it gives you other people's perspectives and adds to your knowledge of how other people feel.

For example, in her discussion of *The Flither Pickers* (Tomlinson, 1992), she expresses the view that historical fiction opens up experiential access to understanding the relationship between individuals, time and society; in her opinion and in that of Clodagh and Sheena, (two members of the book club), readers learn much more about the past from fiction than from textbooks, gaining an insight into the day to day lives of ordinary people, making the past more comprehensible, presenting 'a world enacted' (Iser, 1989, p.251). A salient feature of my young readers' response is their fascination with the development of character, the 'living hermeneutics' of the text (Bakhtin, 1981, p.338), an engagement which Millard (1994) and Sarland (1991) suggest may be more characteristic of girls' response than that of boys. In Year 10, several members of the book club attributed both their enjoyment of Stephen King's novels and their preference for books rather than films to their developing interest in the psychology of the individual because, in Clodagh's words, "Books show you how the mind works". I have suggested that narrative is a metaphor for consciousness and the young readers in my study show a developing interest in the inner lives of characters, their thoughts and emotions and the ways in which they negotiated their subjectivities. Narrative, I have

argued opens up a discursive space where subjectivity can be explored and I will now consider how my research elucidated that process.

Narrative and the Construction of Identity

In constructing a model of selfhood, I have drawn on the insights of the Bakhtinian School (1981, 1984, 1986), arguing that subjectivity is a process of ideological becoming. I have suggested that narrative is an evaluative context for a view of selfhood and presents us with a repertoire of possible selves which we match to our own construction of selfhood. The relationship of possible selves to society is analogous to that of the reader and textual discourse in that both exist in a dialogical relationship to society, a process of ideological becoming (Stephens, 1992). As Anna explains:

It's almost as if for each person who reads a book, the characters give them different lives.

A potent source of pleasure in narrative is the sense of empowerment generated by the contemplation of 'possible selves' who are agentive, independent and self-determining. The empowerment of the protagonist is the empowerment of the reader by proxy, so to speak. Johnson and Fox (1998), in their case studies of adolescent girls' response to narrative, report that their participants, Gillian and Angie, sought:

strong female characters who could serve as role models for them (p.119).

In Cherland and Edelsky's (1993) ethnographic study, the young girls who participated, used their reading to explore possibilities for agency in their own lives. In my research, readers drew emotional sustenance from characters who show courage and determination in facing up to their problems and in the process develop inner resources which help them cope with the vicissitudes of life.

In Sinead's words:

You look at the character and you think to yourself, “Well, I’m going to be as strong as she is. If she can do it, then so can I”.

Frye (1965) has suggested that the quest for identity is central to all narrative but I would contend that it has a special resonance for teenagers at a time of transition in their lives. Its significance is captured by Jeanette, in her observation:

you want to be an individual, to find out who you are really.

Reading helps you to delve into that.

From the Bakhtinian perspective (1981), the self has the potential for agency but it is a situated freedom, constrained by the social processes which constitute the individual. Although each individual occupies a unique position in existence, the self is dependent on the other to provide a sense of wholeness. As a metaphorical representation of consciousness, narrative gives the reader a unique insight into the dialogical nature of subjectivity, how it is constructed out of:

a play of appropriated discourses voices, images, memories and desires (McCallum, 1999, p.94).

In their response to *Face* (Zephaniah, 1999), my book club readers are beginning to show an awareness of the complex interaction between subjectivity and social process, the desire for agentive selfhood and the reality of peer pressure to conform (Rosenblatt, 1968). A narrative such as *Face*, which shows how these pressures might be resolved, is deeply reassuring for teenagers. Sarland (1991) offers the opinion that for his young readers, fiction may be a creation of ‘virtual futures’ (p. 130). This view is supported by Willinsky and Hunniford’s ethnographic study (1993) and by my own research. In elucidating the relationship between actual and symbolic worlds, I have suggested that narrative presents us with a repertoire of possible selves; in the process of negotiating our own subjectivity, we match these possible selves to our own construction of selfhood, forming illusory images of ourselves out of mirrored others in the ongoing negotiation of our identities. My young readers draw on narrative as an interpretive frame for their own lives, finding identity

through confirmation of experience, as in Jeanette's response to *Girls Under Pressure* (Wilson, 1999) or contemplating the reframing of subjectivity through the negotiation of more liberating roles as reflected in Clodagh and Jeanette's response to *Face*. One of the criteria that readers in my study drew on in relation to the evaluation of narrative was that of realism but I have suggested that this requirement does not exclude fantasy. For many of the students who participated in the study, fantasy was a genre of choice. What I think they are searching for is a fictional enactment of issues of salient concern to them, issues to do with identity, relationships, peer pressure, the meaning of life. As Jeanette explains:

In a way, you've come out of childhood, you want to see more of the world, the big wide world – and you just want to explore really.

I have argued that readers, like texts, have repertoires and that these repertoires influence their response to narrative. I will now consider the ways in which my research illuminated the nature of that influence.

The Repertoire of the Reader

Central to my thesis is the dynamic role of the reader in realizing the potential of the text (Eco, 1979; Iser, 1978). All readers bring to the text their own repertoires of personal experience, cultural knowledge, values and beliefs, and these will have a considerable influence on the reader's response. In *SZ* (1975), Barthes shows how the reader generates meaning which, he suggests, is interwoven textually through five codes. Iser (1978) argues that the nature of the interaction between reader and text is partially determined by the extent to which the repertoire of the text and that of the reader is shared. The more committed a reader to a particular ideological position, the less she will be prepared to accept her values being questioned. For example, in her response to *Who Ever Heard of a Vegetarian Fox?* (Kerven, 1990), Anna's commitment to animal rights led to her rejection of the ideological assumptions embedded in the text. In Sarland's study (1991), he argues that his readers' lack of appreciation of *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 1948), can be attributed to the mismatch between their repertoires and that of the text.

I have suggested that interest in a particular subject is a powerful motivational force for reading. For example, Clodagh's passion for Irish History, led in a roundabout way, to her reading *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1992 [1911]). In our book club discussions about the kind of books the girls enjoyed in primary seven, the narratives they talked about, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (Conlon-McKenna, 1990), *Twist of Gold* (Morpurgo, 1991) *The Hiring Fair* (O'Hara, 1993) are all historical novels set in Ireland. Their choice of titles, I have suggested, reflects the wider cultural interest in history in Irish society, in the post-colonial context of changing ideologies of national identity (Keenan, 1997). I have argued that we cannot unravel storied from unstoried selves. In every story there is the echo of other stories. In Barthes's words (1975, p.10):

This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts.

Our perception of reality is influenced by the narratives we have read and these form an important element in the repertoire of the reader. All the members of the book club had early memories of enjoying the experience of reading and being encouraged to do so by family members. Anna talked enthusiastically of the pleasure she had experienced in being able to read by herself and her memories of favourite stories;

the magic of Christmas in the wild wood, the wonderful talking animals in *The Sheep Pig* (King-Smith, 1985).

Reading is a social practice as well as a private activity and I have highlighted the sense of satisfaction experienced by the student in the perception of herself as a reader, who belongs to a community of readers. In her comments on her participation in the book club, Jeanette spoke of her enjoyment in having the opportunity to talk about books with others who shared the same interests. Literary practice constitutes a significant form of 'cultural capital' in our society (Bourdieu, 1973) and Clodagh and Anna both experienced intellectual pleasure in the recognition of their status as sophisticated readers. As Culler (1975) and Meek (1988) remind us, knowledge about a range of narratives and

how they work is a crucial part of the reader's repertoire and teachers have an important role to play in helping students to extend and develop that knowledge.

I will now go on to consider how my research clarified the nature of the interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology inscribed in the text.

Narrative and Ideology

Drawing on the insights of Bakhtin (1981), Medvedev (1978) and Voloshinov (1973), I have argued that the relationship between reader and text is dialogical and *ideological*. However, because of its multi-vocal nature (Bakhtin, 1981), narrative opens up opportunities for readers to question its ideological assumptions. The plurality of the text opens up the possibility of resistant as well as consensual readings. In exploring the relationship between narrative and ideology, I have also drawn on the work of the semiologist, Umberto Eco (1979) who argues that all texts carry ideological assumptions and that in response readers have three options: they can accept the ideology inscribed in the text, they can import their own ideological assumptions or they can adopt a critical stance. In her response to *Who Ever Heard of a Vegetarian Fox?* (Kerven, 1990), Anna adopted Eco's third option, which I have argued is just as valid a response as a consensual reading. Evidence from research shows that young people can be resistant to all kinds of texts (Buckingham, 2000; Moss, 1989; Sarland, 1991). An interrogative reading is emancipatory, empowering the reader to resist the ideology inscribed in the text. The complex nature of the ideological interplay between reader and text has been explored by a number of researchers. Sarland (1991) points out that popular culture may be the locus of ideological conflict and in the collection of papers edited by Christian-Smith (1993a), there is evidence that popular fiction may be a site of accommodation and resistance to hegemonic social control. Indeed, the practice of reading itself may be the locus of accommodation and resistance (Cherland and Edelsky, 1993). Millard (1994, 1997) argues that reading is permeated with cultural assumptions which make it appear to be an activity more suitable for girls. The young readers in my study recognized it as a significant form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) but at the same time used it to explore possibilities for agency in their own lives. In the third strand of my research, drawing on a model of critical pedagogy, I explored the dialogic

interaction between reader and text, focusing on the interplay between the values of the reader and the ideology of the text. I have argued that the full potential of a narrative emerges only in the social, historical context in which it is situated and if students are to make connections between the literary text and the social text (Scholes, 1985), they need to develop an understanding of the discourses surrounding the production as well as the reception of texts. Davies (1993) conducted a research project with primary children, based on response to story. In her essay, *Beyond Dualism and Towards Multiple Subjectivities* (1993), she shows how children who are given access to the necessary conceptual tools can engage in critical analysis. In developing my own project based on response to a class text, my pedagogical aims were to help students develop critical and creative thinking through ideology critique and, to that end, we explored how the novel *Under Goliath* (Carter, 1980) is constructed in relation to point of view, representation of reality and gender, all key elements in the textual inscription of ideology. Students, I have argued, bring their own repertoires to their readings but they also learn ways of reading from the context in which they read (Rabinowitz, 1987). It is part of the teacher's responsibility I would suggest, to help students extend their repertoires by encouraging them to explore beyond what is familiar (Millard, 1994, 1997). The evidence I have produced, does I think, show that by focusing on how a particular narrative works, my students have learnt new ways of interacting with texts, moving beyond personal response to analysis of the complex ways in which particular attitudes, values and beliefs are interwoven in narrative fiction.

I will now consider those aspects of my research that I might have explored more fully, identify opportunities for further research and consider the implications of my research for teaching, learning and policy making. Finally, I will show how our teaching in St Enda's developed as a result of my research project.

Evaluation

In my research, I have highlighted the importance of dialogue in the process of teaching and learning (Barnes *et al*, 1969; Mercer, 1995; Wegerif and Mercer, 1996). I am convinced that the students who participated in the research

developed their understanding of narrative through sharing their ideas, but one of the limitations of the research is that I have not shown (to any great extent) evidence of how response developed through the process of group discussion. This is an area which could usefully be explored by further research to build on work that has been done already, for example, Barnes *et al* (1971) and Rogers and Soter (1997). In the first and second parts of the research, I have for the most part, analysed response when participants had finished reading a particular text. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to have explored the ways in which response developed in the course of reading, as this may have provided useful information about the kinds of questions which might enhance response. This is an aspect which might fruitfully be explored in further research. My study is set in the context of culture, identity and ideology in Northern Ireland and in my discussion I have referred to the relationship between children's book choices and the wider cultural interest in history in Irish society; the ways in which the discourse of the real and the discourse of the imaginary are negotiated, in relationship to Irish historical fiction, open up fascinating opportunities for further research. My focus has been on response to narrative fiction in print form but in the context of the transformation of the literacy landscape through the technological revolution, students will need support in their interactions with an increasingly complex range of texts. How that might best be provided opens up myriad opportunities for further research. In my study, I explored response to narrative in three interwoven contexts. As I explained in the methodology section, my analysis of Anna's response enhanced my knowledge of the ways in which young adolescent readers interact with texts and heightened my awareness of how central the transition from primary to secondary school is in the lives of Year 8 students. It made me aware of the importance of linking their prior experience of narrative to their current reading, to create a sense of continuity between the worlds of the primary and secondary school. An important responsibility of English teachers is the selection of novels to be read in class. The girls, who participated in the book club, commented on the suitability or otherwise of specific texts for this purpose. They also expressed their views about the approaches we had adopted in relation to the shared class text. One of the benefits of the book club was that it gave pupils who were reluctant to participate in whole class discussion, an opportunity to voice their opinions and allowed me to get to know them much better as individuals, as well as to find out more about their reading

preferences. The case study approach I have adopted offers the opportunity to study the fine grain of response, highlighting its subtleties and complexities, and providing a reference point for other such studies. When the narrative I have constructed is woven into the stories of other researchers, I hope it will help to illuminate the intricate patterns of response to narrative fiction.

I will now identify the main principles which emerged from my research and outline the implications of each of these for practitioners and policy makers.

Principles and Practice

Young people need opportunities to be involved in learning that is relevant, motivating, challenging and emotionally engaging.

My focus in this research has been on the dynamic interaction between reader and text in the context of response to narrative. I have argued that response to narrative is a ‘*zone of proximal development*’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p.103), helping students to make sense of human experience in a context in which the affective and cognitive are interwoven (Bruner, 1986), giving them an insight into the dialogical construction of subjectivity and enhancing their metacognitive skills through dialogic interaction and reflection on the text. In my view, response to narrative offers rich opportunities for the development of enjoyable, productive and intellectually challenging learning. We need to develop these opportunities in the context of a changing literacy landscape, making connections between formal and informal reading practices, drawing on the world of popular culture to enhance motivation, creativity and critical awareness, helping pupils to develop their response to visual as well as print texts. In ‘A Way Forward’, I discuss some of the ways in which I am attempting to achieve this in relation to my own practice.

Students need to be given the opportunity to become agents of their own learning rather than merely the recipients of knowledge.

What emerges from my research is the need for young people to create their own meanings and for those meanings to be valued by other members of the classroom community, both students and teachers. This has implications both for my own practice and for that of teachers in general. Narrative opens up opportunities for exploring possibilities of agency, enabling the reader to enter

into a dialogue between the world of the book and the real life ‘*time-space where the world resonates*’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.253). By reflecting on their reading, young people begin to perceive themselves as belonging to a community of readers and this is a source of considerable intellectual and emotional satisfaction. The culture of students is an important educational resource and by entering into a dialogue with students about a wide range of texts, including the popular culture texts which they enjoy, we can accomplish educational goals while affirming student discourse (Millard, 1994). Authentic dialogue is facilitated by open questions which encourage students to think critically and creatively in the knowledge that their ideas, responses and contributions will be valued. This kind of engagement challenges the stereotypical model of teacher-student relationship and facilitates the development of a learning community.

Students need to be given plentiful opportunities to use language as a tool for learning.

Reading is a social practice as well as a private activity and my research shows the importance of the tentative, exploratory use of language in the construction of knowledge and understanding in relation to response to narrative. This has clear implications for all teachers, including myself. By sharing response through whole class and small group discussion, pupils can begin to develop sophisticated analytical skills in examining how texts are constructed, extending their learning through testing their initial responses against the responses of others and building on shared ideas. Through their reading journals, students can begin to value their own readings and find new and interesting ways of responding to texts. My research also highlights the value of talk in developing enthusiastic, critical and committed readers. In relation to my own practice, this has been of particular value in illuminating the subtlety and complexity of response and has encouraged me to develop the idea of the book club. The crucial role of language suggests the need for teachers to give pupils the opportunity to participate, through discussion about texts, in a critical culture, learning to ‘read against the grain’, a collaborative endeavour which Margaret Meek argues ‘is the key to children’s intellectual growth’ (Meek, 1996, p. 90).

My research shows that the teacher has a crucial role to play in scaffolding response to narrative. In relation to my own practice, the process of theorizing and reflecting on the development of response has illuminated my knowledge and understanding of children's encounters with texts and, in my view, such reflexivity would be beneficial to teachers in general, enabling them to gain critical insights into the interplay between reader and text. By drawing on concepts central to literary theory, teachers can devise new and challenging ways of facilitating interaction between reader and text. Students learn about ways of reading from the contexts in which they read (Rabinowitz, 1987) and it is a key part of the teacher's role to help students extend their repertoires. An important responsibility of teachers lies in the selection of books and the need to balance student selected reading with enjoyable yet challenging class texts. It is crucial for teachers to develop their knowledge about the changing textual landscape, becoming familiar with multimedia and multimodal texts, as well as the wide range of fiction written for young people. By getting to know more about students' individual reading practices, teachers can provide a range of texts that cater for their diverse needs, thus encouraging independent reading. By creating a supportive environment in which young people can discuss their reading, teachers can help students to become more confident in sharing their response to narrative.

Policy Matters

In relation to educational policy, the dialogic principle, which is pivotal to my research, implies the need for a coherent, collaborative curriculum which will empower young people and help them to become critical, creative and autonomous learners. The current emphasis on an overly prescriptive curriculum, with its attendant focus on target setting, testing and league tables, would seem to militate against such a goal. However, there are signs that the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) which has just completed a lengthy consultation process in relation to its proposals for KS3 (CCEA, 2003), is committed to the development of a more coherent, flexible and relevant curriculum for young people aged eleven to fourteen. My focus in this research project has been on the interplay between reader and text in the context of response to narrative fiction; the potency of

narrative as an educational resource, the need for teachers to be proactive in promoting books and the diversity of pupils' preferences in relation to narrative fiction all have implications for policy in relation to teacher training. Newly qualified teachers need to have a wide knowledge and understanding of fiction written for young people so that they can facilitate students in developing their reading repertoires. They also need to enhance their awareness of the ways in which technology has transformed the textual landscape, creating a proliferation of new forms of narrative which require the development of fresh, dynamic teaching approaches.

Having discussed the key principles which emerged from my research and their implications for educational policy makers and practitioners, I will now outline the ways in which we developed our teaching in the English department in St. Enda's, as a result of my research project.

A Way Forward

My colleagues and I, in the English department in St. Enda's, are all interested in developing imaginative ways of encouraging students to engage with a range of texts in the context of the emergence of new forms of literacy. The research which I conducted enhanced my awareness of the dialogic nature of learning, the ways in which my pupils were energized through sharing ideas and the extent to which they were willing to be more forthcoming with their opinions in a supportive environment where it is accepted that meaning may be open and indeterminate. Margaret Meek (1988, p.38) reminds us that:

The problem for teachers in secondary school is to give students enough experience of different kinds of text while exploring the secrets and lessons of only some of them.

The class text, if carefully chosen, has I believe much to offer. One of the pleasures of the class text is the development of that 'communion of inner rhythm' (Calvino, 1993, p.122), the sense of delight in shared enjoyment. However, we also need to develop fresh perspectives and approaches to help pupils cope with the increasing complexity of the textual landscape. In the

methodology section, I gave a brief account of a research project into response to narrative, carried out by my first year students, in which they used a digital camera and image manipulation software (see Appendix A). In the English department, we have also developed schemes of work based on investigation of genre, using popular cultural texts such as 'Goosebumps'. In addition, we have introduced shared reading in small groups, where members of each group jointly decide on the selection of a particular novel and do a range of work on it, including role play, drama and artwork of their own choice. With the support of the Southern Education and Library Board Literacy Team, led by Kate O'Hanlon, we have also co-ordinated a number of critical literacy projects, working collaboratively with other departments. The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in Northern Ireland, CCEA (2003) are currently engaged in a review into post-primary education and one of the requirements they have highlighted is the need for pupils to make connections between what they do in different classes; this meshes with my own interest in developing interdepartmental links to increase educational and cultural cohesiveness. Together with the Head of Art and Technology, I have been funded by the Southern Education and Library Board through their 'Dissemination of Good Practice' initiative, to carry out action research into the development of critical and creative thinking, using an interdisciplinary approach. We have already completed one project in which pupils, working in groups of four in their English Class, write a short play in modern English, based on one of the narrative strands in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Each member of the group takes the role of a particular character and then, in Technology, designs and constructs a puppet based on that character. Finally, each group performs their play, in the puppet theatre in the Technology department, for an audience of fellow pupils and invited guests. At their best, the plays written by pupils are exciting and innovative, showing an appreciation of the ludic element, highlighting the artificial nature of the world of Romantic comedy and exposing through parody and intertextual allusion the constructedness of the text. CCEA have plans to disseminate details of the project on their website.

I have already referred to the challenge presented by the emergence of new forms of literacy; one of the most common forms of communication today is that of the combination of words and pictures. Our second action research project aims to help pupils to develop their visual literacy by giving them the

opportunity to study the language and structure of picture books and then to create their own, drawing on modern technology, including computer imaging techniques. These are just some of the ways in which we are supporting our students by helping them to become critical, creative and autonomous learners in the challenging and complex educational landscape of the twenty-first century.

Appendix A:

Year Eight Research Project

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